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SAVED BY A WOMAN.

SAVED BY A WOMAN.

A Novel.

BY

THE AUTHOR OF "NO APPEAL,"

ETC., ETC.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. II.



LONDON :

TINSLEY BROTHERS, 18, CATHERINE ST., STRAND.

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SAVED BY A WOMAN.

CHAPTER I.

WHAT IS TO BE DONE?

THE blow which had fallen on the Rosery was a terrible one; not simply because it had come upon them almost unawares, but because there seemed to be no way of escape from its consequences. For a time it left them in utter despair. It was bad enough for the two girls, but infinitely worse for the old man, who, with all his boasting, had no courage to meet it, and was never free from the feeling that his own carelessness had, in some degree, helped to bring it to pass.

But, as a rule, women bear misfortune far more bravely than men ; and so it happened in the present case. The Captain was literally *hors de combat*, while the two younger sufferers were resolutely trying to face the broad question, *What is to be done ?*

Of course it was far easier to ask the question than to get a satisfactory answer to it, as they soon discovered. But, still, they persevered, doing all in their power to rouse the old man, and to meet the terrible emergency that had befallen them. After some days of almost entire idleness at home, they at last persuaded him to go out for his usual round of duty on the Cliff, knowing that mere change of scene would inevitably bring relief in some shape.

It was while he was away on one of these rounds that Fairleigh paid them a visit, as usual, with a packet of new books. These were soon glanced at and talked over ; but

the girls were evidently not much inclined for talk, and their guest, as clearly, not inclined to curtail his visit. He, of course, wholly unconscious of what caused their silence, and they unwilling to allude to it, if it could be possibly avoided. The ordinary topics of conversation all at once seemed to run dry, and then, in his extremity, Fairleigh asked if the Captain was visible.

"The Captain," they said, "was out; likely to be out for the present; and, moreover, not very well. He had gone out on a long day's round, in fact, to try if the fresh air and exercise would at all restore him."

"It seems to me," replied Fairleigh, at last, "that the whole place is out of sorts to-day, in some strange fashion,—as if it all wanted fresh air and exercise, though I cannot understand why. The two ladies, who are usually the light of the house, are certainly not themselves; and Longfellow's new

poem falls on their ears as tamely as Tupper. The master of the house is away, though I specially wanted to see him, and neither of my fair friends says a word to enlighten me. I cannot offer help where I am uncertain what, or if any, be needed, though I may claim, possibly, to be something more than a mere common acquaintance."

But even this appeal produced no satisfactory reply; and at length the barrister reluctantly took his leave, and set out, he averred, in search of the Captain himself.

"I must try," he said, "whether my old friend is, after all, not within the reach of a kindly word to lift him out of his troubles."

Half-an-hour's sharp walking brought him to the brow of the Cliff, not far from a point overlooking Brewer's Cave, and his own terrible climb on the night of the storm. But though he looked carefully in every direction, not a trace of the Captain was to be seen, either along on the high ground, or below on

the level sand, which, now at low water, stretched away in one long shining curve for a mile or two round the sides of the bay.

It was one of those golden days in September which now and then come to us with a softness and beauty unknown in summer, clothing earth, sea, and sky in a robe of tenderness and subdued grace that seemed to whisper of eternal peace and content. Scarcely a breath of air was stirring across the face of the blue waters, which rolled lazily in on the smooth sand with a faint and dreamy murmur that hardly broke the languid silence. Far away, on the edge of the horizon, lay a long, low bank of grey and misty cloud, crowned along its upper ridge with snowy towers and battlements in a thousand fantastic shapes, as if to shut off from man some immeasurable domain of halcyon rest beyond. Here and there flickered in the sunshine the tawny sail of some distant fishing-boat, as it silently drifted in

the lazy tide and waited in vain for a breath of air to carry it homewards over the calm expanse ; and these, with the exception of a lonely sea-bird, which now and then skimmed lightly across the quiet deep, were the only signs of life.

It was the very scene to allure and to captivate such a mind as Fairleigh's, and knowing the old man's usual line of march along the Cliff, he determined to rest there awhile and await his friend's coming. Flinging himself down, therefore, on the smooth, thymy grass, he lay there looking dreamily out upon the shining sea.

Insensibly his thoughts wandered back to the Rosery, and the fair girl whose life he had helped to save on that very cliff. Then she had been to him little more than a stranger ; but many a long month had since passed away, and she had silently and softly become a dear and intimate friend, whose favourite pursuits, tastes, and studies had grown to be

almost as well known to him as his own. From living almost entirely in the world of books, and finding in them a calm, unbroken, and solitary pleasure, he had slowly become aware that this joy had increased tenfold when it was shared by another. His favourite passages and his special authors had spoken to him, of late, with a new and living grace of which he had been before unconscious; and that grace he had learned to connect with the young and eager scholar whom chance had so happily thrown in his way. She was a mixture of lively archness and girlish timidity that seemed to him as perfect as it was novel. Many a maiden in Lipscombe was as fair as she; not a few boasted of a far more striking beauty. Some, too, were timid enough, simply because foolishly bashful; others full of assurance, and abounding in small talk, simply because they mistook noise and rattle for cleverness. But Hester had a refinement and womanly

tenderness about her which he had found nowhere else, and in which they seemed utterly wanting. She had grown, therefore, in *his* eyes to be the *beau ideal* of all that a woman should be, and gradually filled a place in his heart where the flame of love had never yet been kindled.

Some such thoughts as these floated dreamily through his mind as he lay there lost in pleasant reverie, and harmonised well with the quiet beauty of the whole scene.

Then he called to mind—not without a smile—the recent words of his sister,—“that very designing young person”—“up to every move in the game;” and himself, the poor victim, “old enough to be her father.” *Artful!* he repeated to himself. Hester Langley artful! when it was her utter artlessness that made her so specially charming! The very thought was monstrous—absurd—ridiculous. And once more he smiled at the absurdity of such an idea.

But at this moment he chanced to look down upon the tract of white sand which stretched round the curve of the bay, and there saw a well-known figure, which he quickly decided to be his friend the Captain's, slowly sauntering on towards Brewer's Cave. He rose at once, and, hastily making his way down the winding path, soon reached the foot of the Cliff, and set out in search of the old man, who had, by this time, come to a halt under the lee of a huge rock, and there sat gazing idly on the sea.

Fairleigh came suddenly upon him, so suddenly, indeed, over the smooth, level sand that his approach was as unheard as it was unexpected.

"Well, Fairleigh!" he exclaimed, as they shook hands, "what strange errand brings you down into these quarters?"

"Sheer idleness, Captain,—sheer idleness. I heard at the Rosery that you were this way on duty, and I felt inclined for a chat.

I made you out from the top of the cliff, and here I am."

"And poor company, I fear, you will find me, my friend. I am out of spirits and out of heart with myself, and no one but old Langley to thank for being in such a wretched mess."

"All the more need, then, for a friendly hand to give you a lift, and a friendly word to cheer you."

"It's low water, Fairleigh—dead low water, beyond all help, with me."

"All the better chance, then, of the tide turning. Things at the worst soon begin to mend. And talking of the tide, I see that it's making fast round the outer rock there, and as I do not feel inclined for a ducking, or another sharp climb up the Cliff, we must be on the move."

Then arm in arm the two set off, at a good pace, along the shore, as the sun sank slowly down behind the great battlements of cloud-

land, and twilight fell softly over land and sea.

The dialogue was desultory enough at first, but Fairleigh was determined to rouse the old man, and did his utmost to keep it alive with joke and anecdote, and the latest budget of news ; so that by the time they reached the Cave the Captain, in spite of himself, began to rally ; especially when his companion persuaded him to rest awhile, and smoke a pipe in a well-known and favourite corner.

By degrees the talk wandered insensibly back to the pic-nic, and then to Hester herself, as Fairleigh craftily meant that it should ; though Langley still harped on his favourite string.

“I am getting old and worn out,” said the Captain, at last, “and with no chance, as far as I can see, of leaving a friend behind me to look after the girls. This is the bitterest part of the whole affair ; and it’s all black enough, God knows.”

"Nonsense, my friend—nonsense," was the cheery answer. "Why, man, the tide has turned already. What your special troubles may be of course I cannot say, nor have I the right to ask; but if it is in my power to lend you a helping hand in any way, you have but to speak."

The upshot of this was that within five minutes the Captain had told him the whole story of his troubles.

"There," he added, bitterly, "you see, now, that I am a ruined man, and beyond the reach of help, even if it were offered."

"I see nothing of the kind," replied Fairleigh; "but I do see a chance of saying what I have longed to say for the last hour. You talk, Captain Langley, of the two ladies at the Rosery, and what is to become of them; give me, I entreat you, the right of being their friend when the time comes for you to leave them; if my own turn does not come first. It may seem to you strange

for an old fellow like me to figure in a love-story ; but it is better for me to make a clean breast of it at once. In the last few months your daughter, Miss Hester, has become very dear to me—so dear, that her future happiness will be mine, the highest and purest I can ever know. I ask your permission, at some future day, to tell her this. As for the troubles you talk of, what are the few hundreds of pounds to me ? How can I devote them better than by lending them to a friend ? ”

For a moment the Captain was utterly aghast ; so sudden, so entirely unexpected was his friend's offer. It seemed to him like a deliverance straight from Heaven, and he could at first find no words to answer his companion.

“ As for lending to me,” he at last began, “ it's idle to talk of lending to a man who has nothing. How can I ever repay you a single hundred ? My income is forestalled

—gone for the next year to come, and long before that I shall be in my grave.”

“My dear Captain, you are in a fit of the dismals now, and everything in your eyes seems dark and gloomy. But by the time you have got home, made a hearty supper, and drank a glass of that famous whisky punch of old Betty’s, smoked a pipe, and thought over what I have said, you will be a different man. I have put down the heads of your chief troubles, and will immediately set to work and stay all future annoyance. It shall be done in your name by a clever attorney, a friend of mine——”

“But, my dear Fairleigh,” exclaimed the Captain, “they will never suffer it at the Rosery ; for very shame.”

“They never need know it at all ; or at least not till I tell them. My friend is used to such work, and a single word from me will seal up his lips even from his own wife. It

must, be done, and done quickly, Captain ; or, I can see plainly, you will soon be taking those quiet lodgings for single gentlemen of which your old favourite, Lamb, speaks, and then what is to become of those so dear to you, and so unfit to fight the battle alone ? ”

“ God only knows what will become of them,” he answered, wearily ; “ God only knows. But if I agree to this I must have a clear month to think of it, and see if no other way of escape turns up. Something may happen before then.”

“ Be it so, then,” replied his companion ; “ nothing shall be done for a month ; nothing, in fact, till I hear from you yourself, and then a day’s work will settle it all. But now, Captain, if I have got hold of *your* secret, you have got hold of mine ; and to *that* you have given me not a word of reply. Am I too old, as my sister tells me, to be your daughter’s husband ? Speak

out frankly and fully at once, that I may so far know what my fate is, and make up my mind not to see the Rosery again, or to go there with your free permission to ask her to be my wife, whose love is more to me than that of all other women in the world! But, in any case, whatever your answer is to be, remember I can and will help you as I have said. It will be something, at all events, to save *her* father from ruin, and so to add years of happiness to her life."

"Too old?" repeated the Captain, trembling with emotion; "what has age to do with it, while you have a heart that beats as yours does with all that is noble, and brave, and generous? Such a son-in-law would be an honour to a prince, much more to a broken-down old captain in His Majesty's service. Hester is the only person who can answer *the* question itself, but you have my free leave to ask it when you

will. All I bargain for is that I say nothing to her about——”

“Nothing, Captain ; not a single word, or shadow of a word to her or to any living soul, to turn the scale either way.”

“Speak to her then, my friend, when and how you will ; and may God bless your wooing. I can wish for nothing greater or better than your success. You have made a new man of me when death stared me in the face. But here we are at the cross-roads ; let me shake you by the hand once more, and may God bless you for your words this night.”

They shook hands and parted, the Captain back to the Rosery in a state of joyful freedom, which he could hardly realise ; and his friend to the Manor-house, with a secret in his heart of which he could not speak as yet to his best friend, but which filled him with a quiet joy hitherto unknown to him but in the pages of romance. He, the old bachelor

of fifty, the man of books, of lonely walks, and self-communing, knew that he loved a young and beautiful woman, that she was worthy of his love, and that he might win her if he could.

The calm flush of twilight, the first evening stars, the shadows on the hill-side, the heights crowned with the dying light of sunset, the last faint song of some happy bird as night fell upon her nest of young, the cry of the river, and the sound of distant bells floating down the wooded valley—all whispered to him with one glad voice of love and of Hester. Henceforth, all fair and sweet things lurked under the image of her name.

CHAPTER II.

THE SAPENGRO AGAIN.

THE next day was publishing-day at the *Lipscombe Gazette* office, and the Editor was up at daybreak, and away to work. He stopped, however, at Tom's door on his way downstairs, and gave him a friendly hail.

"I say, youngster, don't wait breakfast for me. If I can get back in time I will; if not, look out for me at dinner, somewhere about 6 p.m. Meanwhile, take care of yourself, and let the Manor-house alone until you have had time to cool."

Tom made some unintelligible reply, turned over into a cosier recess of "blanket bay," and calmly went off to sleep again. When he next woke, as the sun was shining

brightly into his room, he jumped up in a great hurry, and after enjoying a good tub of cold water, went down to a solitary breakfast.

The next question was how to dispose of the rest of the day until dinner-time ; should he call at the Rosery, or go up the valley in search of a brace of trout ? But he took his rod and set out, though still undecided.

For the first mile up the valley he argued to himself the various *pros* and *cons* of the knotty question, without coming to any decision, when a sharp turn in the road settled it for him, as he suddenly found himself face to face with the two ladies from the Rosery on their way into the town. There was no avoiding them, even if he wished to do so. They were as much surprised at the meeting as he was, but both at once stopped and greeted him kindly enough, though Hester did little more than shake hands.

"I was on my way," he said, "to make a call at the Rosery, but, as I hear that the Captain is well, and you are both going in the other direction, I will wish you good-day, and go up and try for a big fish above the mill."

"We shall be at home in a couple of hours," replied Jennie, as they shook hands, "and glad to see you, Mr. Tom, as I am sure the Captain will be, if at home."

"Thanks," he answered, and went on his way with a light heart, saying pleasantly to himself, "Prettier than ever, and as neat a little craft as I ever set eyes on."

As for Miss Hester, all she said to her companion was, "How smart he looks in his gold-laced cap; *that* belongs, I suppose, to a first-mate."

"I didn't notice it," replied Jennie; "but he is looking well, and more sunburnt than ever."

A few minutes later, Mr. Tom was

trudging hastily across the still dewy meadows, up to the deep water above Lipscombe mill, where, under a stiff breeze from the south, he knew from old experience that the best fish would be feeding. This was a couple of miles higher up the stream than the Captain's domain, and, as the fish did rise well there, he spent several hours, wandering from pool to pool, and smoking many pipes. When it got well on into the afternoon, he was resting under the shade of an old ash-tree, and busily engaged with a crust of bread and cheese, which he had brought with him, when a noise in a neighbouring hedge of thorn suddenly arrested his attention, and he turned to see what had caused it.

Pressing cautiously round the stem of the tree, he quickly made out that the noise was caused by a half-naked gipsy-lad making his way through the hedge, and scrambling down into the ditch at the foot of it. Utterly

unconscious of being watched, the boy crept softly and nimbly along the dry ditch down towards the stream, every now and then looking keenly about him, and stopping for a moment, as if in fear of being detected.

The sailor let him get quietly down to the river, then cautiously crept from his hiding-place, dropt into the ditch, and slowly made for the point where the boy had disappeared among some thick bushes at the edge of the bank. At first, the gipsy-lad was nowhere to be seen, but after a more careful scrutiny, Russell detected him in a leafy alder-bush overhanging the water, busily engaged in pulling up some night-lines. Two had already been hauled in, each having on it a brace of good fish, which now lay floundering on the grass. He waited until haul the third was completed, and then, as the boy turned round to secure his prey, Tom rushed in and caught him by the arm before he had a chance of escape.

"You young dog," he said, "this is the way the best fish in the river are poached, is it? Do you know that if the keeper finds you at this game, he will have you before the magistrate, and you will get a taste of the tread-mill?"

"I've tasted that already," answered the boy, "and I don't care to have it again. But Long Bill set the lines, he did, and I only cum to get the fish. Why don't the *Rommany Rye*,* send *him* off to the mill?"

"What do you mean by calling me a *Rommany Rye*, you poaching young rascal, and who is Long Bill?"

"He's my big brother, and it's lucky for you he isn't here; and old Madge is my mammy; and you let me alone, will you?"

"Come out here, then, on the grass," replied Tom, "and bring your lines with you,

* *Rommany Rye*, i.e., gipsy gentleman.

or you will get the best rope's-ending you ever had in your life."

And with these words, he drew out of an inner pocket a short, wax-ended, rope, which he swung round smartly in the air with a sound which the young poacher did not at all relish, as he slowly crept out among the bushes, and stood bare-headed before his captor.

"And so you are old Madge's boy, are you? I know *her* well, and for old acquaintance sake I will let you off this time; but if ever I catch you down here poaching again, I will have you in Lipscombe gaol before you are a day older. Now, be off, before the keeper comes up stream."

Hastily catching up the biggest of the fish from the grass, the gipsy-boy ran off across the meadow, made his way through an opposite hedge, and in a trice was out of sight.

As soon as he disappeared, Tom at once

cut up the lines, and pitched the pieces into the stream, put the remaining fish into his basket for the keeper's inspection if he should meet him, and sauntered down the river in search of a good place for a swim. This was soon found, and having undressed under the shadow of a thick oak-tree, close to the river, and piled up his clothes in true nautical and trim order, plunged into the clear, sparkling water. Having had a good swim up stream and down, and thoroughly refreshed himself, he made his way into the bank, and began to dress in that leisurely and idle fashion which sunshine and a pipe of good tobacco are apt to beget. He had all but finished his toilet, when, to his utter amazement, he missed his cap, and next, in still greater astonishment, his round jacket, which, in his hurry of the morning, he had slipped on instead of the usual fishing-coat.

At first, he thought he must have laid

them down on the other side of the oak-tree, but a minute's search convinced him that such could not have been the case. Not a trace of the missing articles was to be seen in any direction ; nor, after puzzling his brains for half-an-hour, could he hit upon any possible cause for their strange disappearance.

He was as certain as he could well be that not a single human being had come near the spot while he was in the water, either up stream or down. In fact, had anyone done so, his approach must have been at once perceived ; as the pathway by the river was perfectly clear in either direction, and plainly visible from the water. But, search as he might, and guess as he would, both cap and jacket were gone beyond all doubt, and there was now nothing for it but to trudge homewards as he best could, and do his best to escape observation.

But this he was very unwilling to do. In

broad, open daylight, when once he reached the borders of the town, he was sure of meeting a dozen acquaintances of one kind or another ; and not a few who would greet his strange and forlorn appearance, in his shirt sleeves, with shouts of laughter, and make it a standing joke against him for months to come. Yet what else was to be done ? It still wanted an hour or two of sunset, and there was no way of reaching home but through the High Street of Lipscombe.

Then, all at once he thought of the young imp whom he had caught poaching. *He*, beyond all question was the thief. Of course, his cap and jacket were by this time safe among the Rommany people, somewhere in the neighbourhood ; and his only chance of recovering them was by setting off at once in search of his old friend Madge ; when known to be his, *she* would deliver them up to him without fail. Having, therefore, hastily packed up his rod and

fishing-basket, he left the river, and taking a cross-road through the woods—well-known to him in bygone days,—made his way towards the little glen where he had last parted with his old crony, before the *Lapwing* sailed.

Half-an-hour's rapid walking brought him to the little dingle ; but it was silent and empty. The gipsies had recently been there ; for there were scraps of straw scattered in all directions, and clear traces of their wood fire in more than one place ; but not a single living creature was to be seen. They might be camped within half-a-mile of him, or have gone away into a distant part of the county. Then he suddenly called to mind that about a mile lower down the valley there was an old deserted quarry, where Madge and her tribe sometimes pitched their tents ; and after some thought, to this he turned his now somewhat weary steps. It was away from the river, and nearer the

high road, but soon and easily found, and as he drew near to 'it a thin curl of blue smoke, winding up among some tall elms, told him that his guess had been a good one.

A sudden turn in the road brought him at once close to the gipsy fire—a tent close at hand, with a couple of light carts tilted up into the hedge. Two or three mongrel dogs rushed out to bark at him, as he came near; but an old man, who was mending a pot near the fire, sullenly went on with his work, without looking up; while "Long Bill," who lay asleep on a bundle of straw close at hand, merely roused himself for a moment to curse the noisy dogs, and turn over on his side to sleep again.

Our old friend, Madge, sitting hard by at her usual basket-work—much as we last saw her,—started up at once to welcome the new comer.

"Down, dogs—down," she cried; "can't

ye see it's an old friend come to see the old gipsy-woman ? ”

“ Well, Madge, how goes the world among the good people here ? The sailor is home again, you see, at last, after the fair wind you gave him, and many a rough one too, that was not quite so civil.”

“ Pretty much the same here, Captain, up and down, up and down, it is with the poor Rommany people. Sometimes rough water, and sometimes smooth ; but well enough as times go.”

“ Why, you look younger than ever, Madge, I think ; and it seems quite like old times again, to see the kettle over the fire, and the smoke among the trees. So, I'll light my pipe, and come to an anchor for a bit here, if I may, and have a chat.”

And with these words he drew a half-burnt stick from the fire, and sat himself down on the ground, for a cosy talk ; while

the old woman went on with her basket-work.

But the looked-for chat was just the thing that did not come. The old man at work on the kettle more than once muttered some unintelligible words in their unknown "lingo" to his companion on the straw; but Madge by degrees grew more and more silent, until Russell fairly had all the talking to do for himself.

She declared at last there was no news "in their poor country," and that the Captain, just home from sea, was the man to have seen and heard more than any old woman who never went further than Lipscombe town at fair-time, or a chance *duk-keripen*. He had nothing for it, therefore, at length, but to knock the ashes out of his pipe, and prepare to go.

"Well, Madge," he said, as he rose up, "you know pretty well, I guess, why I have hunted you out this morning, without a cap,

and in my shirt-sleeves. So there is little use in my telling you."

"*Cap ?*" replied the old woman, in utter surprise ; "how should the poor gipsy-woman know why the Captain goes a-fishing without a cap or a coat ? She has never stirred from the fire-side here since she got the bits of stick together to cook her man's victuals at six o'clock this morning. How should she know ?"

"Then, Madge," replied the sailor, "I will tell the poor gipsy-woman. An hour ago I caught that young imp of yours down by the river, pulling up night lines, and instead of taking him off to the keeper's, below the mill, I let him go with a jolly good rowing, as you know by this time well enough. Then I went down the river, and while getting a swim in the miller's pool, a thief laid hands on my cap and jacket ; and so I guess that the young poacher must have watched me into the .

water, crept up among the trees, and carried them off. That's why I come here in this scarecrow fashion ; and I think it rather hard on an old friend to be served such a very scurvy trick. However, I am quite willing to take it as a joke, and to pay half-a-crown as prize-money for my carelessness, instead of going in search of the Lipscombe constable. The boy is skulking about here somewhere at this very moment, I dare say, and within reach if you give him hail."

"Aye, aye," muttered the woman, in reply ; "just like the rest of 'em ; whatever is lost, or stolen, or strayed, it's nobody but the poor Rommany folk that is thieves and vagabonds. You leave your 'duds' down there by the river, where the first tramp that comes by can help himself, and then of course it's the poor '*chabo*' that is the thief, when maybe he's miles away. What if he did take up a line and a fish or two out of the river ? Did God

'Amighty make 'em swim there only for the grand folks in fine clothes, and money in their pockets? If you want the 'chabo,' you had better give him a hail yourself. But that's Long Bill there on the straw, if he will do as well. Send your constable to *him*—he's welcome to come and search as soon as he likes."

Whereupon Long Bill started up, and with a sulky oath declared "he was ready for any d——d constable the *Rye* * liked to send; and as for the jacket and the cap, the *Rye* had better go down the river where he left 'em, and not come prowling about honest folks' place. If that didn't please him, Long Bill would fight him for 'alf-a-crown there and then."

And to this angry outburst the gentleman engaged on the kettle added a few words of a still more furious and savage

* *Rye*, i.e., gentleman.

kind ; to which Mr. Russell was wise enough to make no reply.

He saw, indeed, plainly, that he was already getting the worst of it, and as he had no relish for a pugilistic encounter with either of the two men, he quietly took up his fishing-basket and rod, and without another word, made his way back to the town ; his chance of calling at the Rosery being now entirely out of the question. It was getting dusk by this time, and he must trust to the darkness to escape the greetings of any chance acquaintance, who might fall in his way.

As luck would have it, though he passed many persons coming and going on his way home, not one chanced to be an acquaintance, and he reached his lodgings in High Street, well content to have escaped a noisy greeting. Once there he let himself in with a latch-key, and stepped quietly into his own room without being seen even by

the servant. Then he slipped on an old jacket, and was safe. His old companion, Roper, had, he found on inquiry, gone to report proceedings at some public meeting in a neighbouring town, and would not return till the next day.

For some little time after this he had many bitter things in his heart against Madge and the whole tribe of *Rommany* rogues; but by degrees the whole affair slipped from his mind, and in a few weeks was all but forgotten. And this, all the more readily, because he had a strong motive for concealing it from his friends, especially from Paul Pry, who would have spread the news far and wide, and made it a standing joke against him for months to come.

Now and then, however, he apparently answered some of these official despatches, but no longer with anxiety and despair on his face, or with trembling fingers. On the contrary, he now wrote boldly, briefly, and with a dashing hand, on large paper, sealing his letter in red wax, with the Admiralty seal, and putting his initials, *J. L.*, in the corner, with a goodly flourish.

Every one of these happy signs was carefully and gladly noted by the two women who watched and loved him so well ; but when they questioned him on the subject, or even alluded to *Wheal Pentilly*, he turned off the subject with a joke, or talked of something else, with such a cheery smile on his face, that his questioners could extract nothing more from him.

Thus the battle went on pleasantly enough for some little time, the old man not daring, as yet, to explain his deliverance from bondage, and his two opponents continually

foiled, and yet growing daily more determined to elicit the truth. So far, he had tried to persuade himself that he was really in hopes of help from some other quarter than Fairleigh. But he knew in his heart all the time that nothing had turned up, or was in the least likely to turn up, that could be of the slightest service in his present extremity ; and yet, like all weak men in such a strait, he was slow to admit this consciousness even to himself, far less to confess it to his friend, though it was on that friend's help alone he was actually relying for extrication. Every day, therefore, he found the task of replying to his cross-questioners more and more difficult, as the necessity for applying to the Manor-house became more and more inevitable. At last came a day when he was obliged to make a move of some kind, if only in his own defence.

He was smoking his morning pipe, as usual, when the postman brought him a

letter, in a large envelope, bearing printed in the corner the words *Wheal Pentilly*, which instantly caught Hester's eye, and brought back to her mind the misery such a letter had caused a month before. Now, however, the recipient opened the packet, as if it had been a pleasant invitation to dinner, glancing lightly at the contents, and then thrusting the sheet idly into his pocket.

Hester's decision was formed at once.

"Now," she cried out, in a bright and eager voice, "we are both determined, papa, to have the whole mystery explained to us. You have some scheme or plot in your head to get rid of all this weary trouble, that has weighed us down so long, and we insist upon ——"

But here, suddenly glancing at her father's face, she came to a full stop. There was upon it a puzzling expression of pain and mortification, if not of anger, which she had

never seen there before, and which she hardly dared to encounter.

"Hessy, my child," he answered, very gravely, "you are speaking hastily to your father. There are good reasons why I can now tell you nothing, absolutely nothing, about this mystery, as you call it. In good time you shall know all. But I have promised to tell you nothing for the present, and I must keep my promise."

Then he hastily put on his hat and coat, and went away, without another word. And it was, indeed, time for him to be gone, and full time, if he availed himself of his friend's help to go at once and ask for it. This *must* be done, and without delay ; and the task of breaking the news to the two who loved him so well, and had toiled so bravely for him, he gladly resolved to leave to another, more skilled than himself in pleading for a cause that required defence.

As soon, therefore, as he had completed

his morning round of duty, and received his reports from the men under his charge, he lost no time in repairing to the Manor-house, where he found the barrister alone, and at leisure.

"I am come, Mr. Fairleigh," he said, "to ask for your help. The *Wheal Pentilly* people are pressing me hard, and I have no friend to turn to but you. Are you still able to lend me a helping hand?"

"Able, willing, and ready, my friend. I have but to pull the string, of which I told you, and in less than a week the whole trouble will be at an end. All I complain of is, that you have delayed coming so long, put up with the worry of fresh duns, and kept me away so long from the Rosery."

"Ah, there!" replied the Captain, "there, at the Rosery, lies the hardest part of the whole business. I was driven to my wits' end this morning to escape from their cross-questioning; and no one can tell the story

to them but yourself. It is fairly beyond my power, old and tough as I am ; and though Jennie is like my own child——”

“Leave me,” answered Fairleigh, “only leave me my own time and place to fight the battle, and I will engage to win it ; if not for myself, at least for you. I will at once see my man of business at Dormouth, put the whole affair in train, and then take my chance of finding the ladies alone at the Rosery, eager, you say, for news.”

“Hungry as fish after a shower of rain, and safe to rise, as Tom Russell would say, at the first fly that falls in their way.”

“I will be that fly,” replied his companion gaily. “And Tom Russell, I suppose, is that handsome young sailor whom I see now and then so busy down by the river ?”

“Yes, an old friend of both the girls’, and just home from sea, with his head full of the wonders of China and Japan ; first-mate of his ship, and his pockets full of money. An

idle dog though, and ready, so they say, for a sly bit of poaching, or even smuggling if it falls in his way."

And then the old man, after once more heartily thanking his deliverer, shook hands with him, and wended his way homewards, full of many thoughts, but rejoicing that he had shifted his main burden to the shoulders of another better able to bear it than himself. The sky seemed to him to have completely cleared once more ; the wind was fair, and the good ship within sight of port. It was in this frame of mind that he reached the well-known gate of the Rosery, and hurried across the little garden.

But as he drew near to the door of the house, to his utter surprise he heard the sound of loud and angry voices, and the short, low bark of Jack, an old terrier who lived in a kennel at the back. Pushing open the door, and making his way into the hall, the source of the uproar was plain enough.

In the middle of the passage stood old Betty, armed with a long broom, which she brandished fiercely in the face of a mean, dirtily-dressed man, who had retreated into a corner behind the umbrella-stand, as if in fear of his life at the following words: "I'll teach you, you poor mean tramp, to come here with your pack of lies about mending chaney,* just to frighten a house full of women, and ready enough, I'll be bound, to pick up any stray thing that falls in your way. Turn out o' this, I say, and be off with you, if you don't want your face rubbed down with this broom! Off at once, and—"

But here she came to a full stop, as the door opened and in walked her master, looking puzzled enough, as he well might, at so strange a scene.

"What on earth, Betty, is the meaning of all this row! and who is that fellow behind the umbrellas?"

* *Chaney*, Devonshire for "China."

"All right, Captain," said the little man, now creeping boldly out from his entrenchment behind the umbrellas ; "all right. I only come in the way of business with this little account from Jacob Levy's, that the gov'nor will settle, I'm bound, in two minutes ; and this lady flies on me out of the kitchen, as if I was a dog, and offers to drive me out of the house. It's only a trifle—seventy-five, eight, ten," he added, as he walked up to the old man, and tapped him on the shoulder—"a mere trifle for an officer and a gent ; and I'm sorry to trouble you so late at night, I'm sure."

At these ominous words, the Captain turned very pale, wearily hung up his hat, and beckoned his enemy to come into his own sanctum.

"All right, Betty," he exclaimed, "put away your broom, and let the ladies know that I am busy, and cannot be interrupted."

Once inside the room, he turned to the man, and said calmly enough—

"Now then, Jonas, what is the total of this business, and on whose account do you come?"

"All quite regular, Captain, and only seventy-five, eight, ten, same as you paid that tenner upon six weeks ago; but I must have it to-night."

"Quite impossible, Jonas, to-night. To-morrow, you shall have every farthing without fail."

"Very sorry, Captain, to do anything inconvenient, but my orders is very strict; and the last thing the gov'nor said was, the man or the money, Jonas, before to-morrow. So you see, Captain, there is nothing for it, though I don't mind waitin' an hour or so, if you've minded to be on the square, honour bright, and no dodging."

"But I have not a farthing in the house, Jonas, and unless I can go out for an hour or two I can do nothing."

"Very sorry again, Mr. Langley, I can't

let you out of my sight. But there is a fly all ready down the lane, and you can go quite easy down to Levy's place, and settle it all to-morrow, no doubt."

Then the Captain saw plainly that he was in an evil case, and that in spite of fair weather the day of darkness had come, and the ship was all but wrecked in sight of port. He flung himself sadly down into his old arm-chair, buried his head in his hands upon the table, and at last fairly cried like a child.

Apparently well used to such sights, the little dirty man at first regarded his prisoner with unconcern, but the weeping became so piteous and so genuine, that even Jonas was at last touched. Touching the old man gently on the shoulder, he said very quietly—

"Don't take on, Captain ; don't take on so. Upon my soul, I can't do no other than I said just now ; and it's only for one night. Come now, cheer up."

At this moment there came a soft tap at the door, and in walked Hester, pale and anxious, but with a quick, firm step that roused even the Captain from his sudden despair.

"Papa," she said, "what *is* all this terrible business? I *must* know."

The old man paused for a moment before he answered, but then felt indeed that the time was come, and his daughter must know all.

"Jonas," he said, "if you will go into the kitchen for ten minutes, I give you my honour that I will not leave the room until you come back. I must speak to my daughter alone. There is a key in the door, if you prefer locking us in; only go at once."

"All right, Captain, as many minutes as you please. P'raps I'd better take the key. 'Safe bind, you know, is safe find.'"

Then Jonas disappeared, and had no pleasant time of it in the kitchen for the next

quarter of an hour, though his old enemy with the broom never opened her lips, but simply regarded him as some unclean animal whose presence she had to endure.

Nor, at first, did matters seem much better in the parlour. Father and daughter were alone, but neither seemed inclined to break the terrible silence.

CHAPTER IV.

HESTER'S MISSION.

FIVE minutes before, the Captain had determined to tell his daughter the whole story ; but now he found himself alone with her, and looked up into her kind, loving, gentle face, full of tender anxiety, but full, also, of courage and truth, and honour and trust, he shrank back from revealing the miserable tale. Brave as a lion, as far as mere bodily courage was concerned, he dared not tell her of the whole scheme of hoped-for deliverance, by once more having recourse to borrowed money. He knew well that, for many a year past, his plan of living on upon borrowed money had been a secret sorrow both to her and Jennie. But the habit had

grown upon and gradually mastered him ; and, as all such habits do, had left him so far weakened and demoralised : it had made a coward of him.

There was no need he thought, after all, why he should tell her the whole story. He would only implore her to go to the Manor-house, and ask for temporary help to free himself from this one debt of Levy's.

"Hester," he said, at last, and his voice trembled as he spoke, "you ask what this terrible business is : I will tell you. I am arrested for a debt of seventy-five pounds, and I have not five in the house. Unless I can get the money within the next two hours I shall have to pass the night in a gaol, and many nights to come, perhaps ; and to-morrow the place will be in the hands of this hungry Jew, and every stick on board be sold up to pay expenses."

"But can nothing be done ?—is there no way of stopping them ?"

"Nothing! Only let that fellow once taste money, it will be like a tiger's first taste of blood, and drive him crazy for more. He won't even let me stir from this place for an hour, nor let me out of his sight."

"Not if Jennie and I went to him and implored him for one day's delay?"

"You might just as well try to melt a stone in a basin of warm water. Besides, Hussy dear, this poor wretch, Jonas, has no power in the matter. He is only a servant; and his orders are to bring the man or the money this very night. He has a fly now waiting in the lane, and unless I pay down the seventy-five pounds he will take me with him. And the law is on his side: so I may as well prepare to go."

"But can *nothing* be done?" said Hester, as her eyes filled with tears. And she looked eagerly into the old man's face.

"Nothing, my dear, unless—unless you can borrow the money."

"Surely," she replied, "if Jennie and I offer him my watch and our trinkets he will give us *some* time?—they must be worth twenty pounds."

"Twice twenty are of no use, Hessy; he will have it all, or have me for a lodger."

"But who will lend you seventy pounds?"

"Ah! there's the rub. It is hopeless, I see. I know but one man who has seventy pounds to lend. *He* could spare it well enough, if he were but here. But you won't ask him."

"Who, papa,—who is it?"

"Fairleigh, at the Manor-house."

"Impossible, papa,—impossible. I could not ask him. Any other person in Lipscombe I could—I would ask; but Mr. Fairleigh—it is impossible that I could ask."

"Then I may as well pack up my carpet-bag, my child, and get ready to go. I have told you of the only man who can help me. You have but to ask him, and have the

money at once. You can save me from a debtor's prison, and *you* only. Will you save me, or shall I ring for Jonas?"

"Ring for Jennie, papa,—tell her the whole story; she may have some plan to help us."

"My dear child, Jennie would, if need be, cut off her right hand to save me. But she would have a dozen reasons why you should not go to Fairleigh. I know her of old. No, no; if *you* will not save me, let me know the worst at once. Not one word to her. Shall I ring or not?"

For a moment Hester was silent; but her pale face and sparkling eyes showed how sharp a struggle was going on between her sense of duty and her wish to help her father.

"Give me," she said, at last, "five minutes, papa, that I may try and think out what answer to give you. I am bewildered."

"As many minutes as you like, my child,

as long as Jonas is content to wait. But there is no help for it, Hessy, if you fail me now."

Hester walked idly to the window and looked out upon the calm, still twilight, the last rays of which were slowly fading into night. The moon was rising, and her silver light shone fairly and softly over the quiet valley, as the distant murmur of the river fell on her listless ear. But the beauty of the night brought no peace to her troubled heart, nor strength to decide the one point of doubt. The far-off sound of the rushing water brought back to her a flood of memories from the past; of happy days spent by the river with those she loved; of birds and flowers that sang and blossomed; and then, in spite of herself, came the image of the gay and handsome young fisherman, and many a pleasant chat by the hawthorn hedge; then that stolen kiss, and the secret interview she had witnessed at the Dingle Farm.

Next came the thought of other and later days ; of quieter, truer joy ; new books, and the kindly voice that had unfolded their full beauty to her,—*his*, as she well knew, who had rejoiced in all her new pleasure, and found new happiness in hers. This was the man to whom she was to go as a beggar, and ask for money. It seemed now more impossible than ever. She knew in her heart of hearts that she had but to ask him, and her request would be instantly granted, almost before it was named ; and knowing this, it was doubly hard to go. Rather than do so, she had long ago said that she would sooner bite off her tongue. But all further reverie was put an end to by a loud rapping at the door, and the impatient voice of Jonas, who, quite tired of Betty's society, now eagerly demanded, "How much longer he was to be kept knocking his heels in the kitchen ?"

"Time's up, Captain, and I must be off,

either with the money or with you inside the fly. It's all one to me ; but I *must* be going."

"Father," said the girl, "it breaks my heart to do it ; but I will go—go now at once."

"God bless you, my child !" replied the old man." And then he kissed her very tenderly, and blessed her as his darling Hussy for saving him from utter ruin.

But she had no heart to return his embrace, and only begged that the door might be opened, so that she might be gone ere her courage failed.

Then, without another word to anyone, she went to her own room, dressed hastily, and in five minutes was hurrying through the dark, moonlit lane towards the Manor-house.

"Come along, Jonas, come into the kitchen," said the Captain, "and get some supper. Within an hour you shall have the

full money. A friend has turned up who will do all I want."

So sure—so easy—so void of all doubt he deemed his way of escape from the fangs of Mr. Jacob Levy.

Meanwhile, Hester was bravely making her way on towards the Manor-house. But as she got nearer and nearer to her destination, her courage began to fail, and she grew more and more puzzled in trying to settle in what exact way she should proffer her petition. But ponder it as she would, she could come to no fixed plan. If he had been an entire stranger, her task would have been, so she thought, a far easier one. She would then have made a plain, unvarnished statement, and let the case stand entirely on its own merits, or have pleaded, as best a daughter might, for a father in trouble. But she had to deal with a man to whom her slightest avowed wish in any matter had, she fancied, of late, become more and more

a ruling motive. Not that he had ever admitted this, either to her or others, in so many words ; but his actions had constantly proved to her that this was the case. And as she now looked into the past, instances of this seemed both plain and many.

As she arrived at this point in her reflections, she reached the bottom of the tall avenue of chestnut trees which led up to the house : and the long vista of gloomy shadow, chequered with broken patches of white moonlight, filled her for the moment with new thoughts. In the broad day-light she knew her way well enough, and had often enjoyed her walk through the green shade. But, now, there was an uncanny, weird look about the whole place, which, in spite of many brave resolutions, made her heart beat as she entered it. But to turn back, then, would be sheer cowardice. And even if the ghost-story about the haunted avenue were a true one, her way lay clearly

onward ; and onward she went, unconsciously increasing her pace as she advanced.

She had already traversed far more than half the distance, when the sound of distant footsteps fell on her ear, and, trembling, she stopped a moment to listen. But not a sound was to be heard, except the occasional rustle of some small woodland creature among the autumn leaves, or the sighing of the wind overhead among the half-naked branches. On, therefore, she went again, with new courage, which suddenly failed once more, as the sound of steps again reached her—this time all but close at hand. All at once she found herself close to a tall, dark figure, as a well-known voice exclaimed, “ Who goes there ? ”

“ Oh ! Mr. Fairleigh,” she cried, “ is it you, indeed ? ”

“ Good God ! Miss Hester,” he hurriedly answered, “ what has brought you here at this time of night ? But, pray, do not be

terrified. I am not the ghost, though this is his favourite time and place. Come up to the house at once, and tell me what is the matter. You are trembling," he added, as he shook hands, "come up to the house at once ; my sister is at home ; and there you can tell us ——"

But this was what Hester especially dreaded. Whatever she said to Mr. Fairleigh, must be said to him alone, and certainly not within hearing of that august personage he had named.

"No !" she hurriedly exclaimed, "there is no need to go to the house—thank you ; but if you can spare time to walk with me here for a few minutes, I will explain the cause of my untimely visit."

"Willingly," he answered, "most willingly, most gladly. But you must take my arm through this wilderness of a road, or you may stumble against some of the fallen branches."

She was about to refuse his proffered help, but, as luck would have it, at that very moment tripped over an old root, and would have fallen, had he not caught her hand.

"My eyes," he said, cheerily, "are more used than yours to the darkness, and I know the path well, so you must do as you are told. And now I am all attention. My lady visitors are so few and far between, that I am fairly puzzled to guess the cause of my good fortune to-night."

For a moment she was silent, but at last the words came.

"Mr. Langley," she said, in a clear, calm voice, "I am come most unwillingly, on a painful errand—so painful, that I would have escaped from it entirely, if I could."

"Is there no way," he cheerily answered, "in which I can make it less painful? no word of mine that can make the task an easier one? If so, count it spoken, and——"

"Nay," she answered, "beggars must not be choosers; I have a favour to ask, and I must ask it—against my own will, and in spite of myself, simply for my father's sake."

"It is granted, Miss Langley, before you speak; if you will, without another word. But," he added, suddenly, and with an impetuosity that made her tremble, "I must reverse the order of things, and implore you, before you speak, to listen to a petition of mine. I have long wished, but never dared, to make it. Will you give me a hearing?"

To this query she could but give a faint assent.

Then, in a firmer, calmer, voice he continued—"My words, Miss Langley, shall be few, and, as they concern the happiness of my whole life, I ask you to weigh them well. But whatever answer you give to them, be assured that your own request to

me I consider granted—fully, entirely—and only put aside for the moment. As to my own petition, I have never even remotely hinted at it to you—scarcely dared to whisper it to myself—so that it may well take you by surprise. But if so, do not imagine that I am acting hastily, on the spur of the moment; the thought has been in my heart for months past, deeply and well weighed, till it has fairly mastered me, and at last driven me to speak. You know me well enough, I think, Miss Langley, to believe this much. The two past years have been the happiest of my life—the happiest and brightest, because they have taught me to find my truest joy in the happiness of another—and that other is yourself. It is no mere sudden, boyish, fancy that now forces me to speak; but the strong, deep, passion of a man's heart for all that is most worthy of man's love and admiration—for beauty, and tender-

ness, and truth, and all that makes a woman's highest loveliness."

Here the speaker paused for a moment in his earnest and rapid outburst ; but, though he felt a little hand tremble on his arm, not a word came in reply, and he went on again.

"I have but a word more to add, Miss Langley. You have heard my story now, and all I can urge on its behalf. Does it find a single echo in your own heart ? or is it sheer folly, for so old and grave and battered a suitor as myself, to dream of sharing in a life so young, so fresh, and fair as that which has dawned upon me after many a dark day ?"

Then Hester felt that at last she must speak, though she scarcely knew what her answer would be.

"Your words," she replied, "have taken me so utterly by surprise, that I know not how to answer them, as I ought, and as they

deserve. I thank you for them heartily. Any woman might well be proud of such love as you offer ; and I will even own that it is pleasant to me to think that I have added to the brightness of the past year, but——”

“ Say not another word,” he interrupted, “ I implore you, at present, Miss Langley. I was thoughtless, selfish, mad, to attack you in this violent fashion. Give yourself time, full time, to think over what I have said ; and then, whatever your answer, I know it will be true and generous, and worthy of yourself. Now tell me your own present trouble, and command my utmost and best endeavour to remove it. It is for your father’s sake, you say, that you come ; how can I help him ? ”

“ Only for his sake, only on his account—to save him from prison,” she answered, eagerly, “ that I am come. The miserable story is soon told ; he is arrested for debt,

seventy-five pounds, and is unable to pay a single farthing. A sheriff's officer is in the house, and even now may have taken him away, while I have been delaying——”

“No, no,” he replied, “the fault is wholly mine—while *I* have been selfishly delaying you ; but let us not waste another minute. The money you can have, if it *must* be paid to-night, instanter. But I must go back to the house for it. Will you go with me, or wait my return here? In five minutes I will be with you again. The avenue is perfectly safe, and it is too late for the ghost to appear to-night.”

“I have no fear,” she answered, “and will gladly wait for your kindly help, if it be not too late for help, for I must be the bearer of it myself.”

At these words, Fairleigh was off like a shot. Even a grave man of forty can run, when his mission is for the woman whom he loves ; and in less than three minutes he

had rushed, panting and breathless, into the library, where "the august personage" presided at a small tea-table.

"Good heavens! Henry," she exclaimed, "what in the world is the matter, that you rush in upon me in this distracted fashion? Tea has been ready for the last half-hour, and now, of course, is cold and sloppy, as you call it."

"No tea, thanks; there is nothing on earth the matter, and I shall be back in an hour or two; but don't sit up."

With these words, and snatching up a pocket-book from an inner drawer of the table, he rushed out of the room as swiftly as he had entered it.

Half a minute more brought him to the stables, where Curtis, the groom, was making up a cosy bed for his horses. There and then ensued a short and rapid dialogue.

"Curtis!"

"Yes, sir."

"How long will it take you to get out the pony-carriage, and harness the ponies for a hard drive?"

"To-night, sir?"

"For God's sake, Curtis, answer my question, *How long?*"

"Seven or eight minutes, sir, if you bears a hand and holds the lantern yourself. John, he's off—he is in bed."

"Say half that time, Curtis, and it will be ten shillings in your pocket while John snores."

In less than five minutes the carriage was ready. Fairleigh jumped in, seized the reins, and drove madly down the winding path towards the Avenue.

Curtis, the meanwhile, stood at the open stable-door for a time in speechless amazement. Then his senses returned to him, it seemed, and he cried out, in pure "Devonshire" Doric, "Lord! Lord! he's mazed, surely. He'll tear they ponies' legs to smash,

and scat the carriage all to shivers." Neither of which ominous prophecies, be it observed, ever came to pass, though no raven is more of a croaker than your faithful, old, family servant.

The two little bay ponies, accustomed to the placid efforts of Miss Sarah Fairleigh and her slow, dyspeptic, driving, suddenly woke up, at a most unseemly hour of the night, to the full meaning of whip and reins. Who the charioteer might be was unknown, but in one respect he was like to "Jehu, the son of Nimshi,"—he drove furiously. They dashed across the garden and round into the avenue at a pace which brought them in less than two minutes to the place where Hester still sauntered up and down in the moonlight.

"Forgive me, Miss Langley," said Fairleigh, "for detaining you so long. I have lost you five minutes in hunting up Curtis; but the ponies are fresh, and if you will jump in we

can do more than make up for lost time. Pray give me your hand. Wrap yourself in this cloak, for the breeze is straight in from the sea to-night, and it grows cold."

Then away they rattled, at a headlong pace, up hill and down hill, making the sparks fly from the flinty road, and every moment narrowly escaping an upset, as Fairleigh, in entire ignorance of the charioteer's art, urged the two small, fiery, steeds to their utmost stretch of speed.

Yet he chatted gaily the whole time, as if to divert his companion from the thought of her own troubles, and of his recent and unexpected revelation. He pointed out to her the line of silver sea sparkling faintly in the distant horizon, here and there crossed by the deep shadow of a cloud ; the hazy splendour of the great arch of the milky way overhead ; now and then the green spark of a glow-worm in the hedge as they whirled rapidly by, or the broad, faint sheen of the

moonlight as it fell in strangely-grotesque patches on hill-side and valley. But, with infinite tact, he avoided all allusion to himself, and to the errand that had brought her to the Manor-house ; so that, in spite of herself, Hester was both interested and amused.

"There," he said, as they at last pulled up with a sudden jerk at the gate of the Rosery, "considering that I never handled the reins before in my life, and that the ponies are given to shying, we have not, I think, done badly. The pace has been a slashing one, but here we are safe and sound. There," he added, "is the packet of notes—just £80. Pray do not let my name appear in the matter. Captain Langley knows that he can repay me when he will ; only let me know when I can again be of service. Good-night."

So they shook hands and parted.

Jonas, the sheriff's officer, had long since grown weary of waiting the arrival of the

promised help, and more than once threatened summary proceedings. But whisky-punch, of Betty's own brewing, in conjunction with a pipe of good cavendish tobacco, carried far too many guns for him, and he quietly succumbed into a state of placid and harmless good nature after the administration of the second tumbler, and a prophecy of a third. All that the Captain vouchsafed in the shape of explanation to Jennie was,—

“As soon as Hester comes back, my dear, all this business will be put to rights ; Jonas will be on the tramp, and I shall be free to light my pipe. Until then I can do nothing, and I leave it to her to tell all the story.”

Such was the state of affairs on Hester's return, and the main issue of the evening may be well left to the reader's own conjecture, after noting the two facts that the Captain smoked the pipe of peace that night by his own fireside, and that Hester, in spite of her father's earnest entreaty, went supperless to

bed, leaving poor Jennie still in a state of utter bewilderment.

"I will tell you all," she said, "to-morrow morning ; but now my brain is in such confusion that I must get to sleep."

Her sleep was broken enough when it came at last ; but it brought with it the oblivion that only sleep can give, and she rose the next day with the conviction that she had at least done her duty, and in reply to Mr. Fairleigh's own petition, had only said what a maiden might say when hard pressed for an answer to such a direct query.

CHAPTER V.

A STAB IN THE DARK.

SOME men are utterly knocked down by such a calamity as had befallen the Captain, and long in recovering from the blow, even when its first bitterness has past away. But he was not one of these. The next morning he was up betimes and away on duty as full of spirits and life as if he had never owed a sixpence.

The two girls, therefore, were left in peace for a quiet chat. Hester knew well that a talk was inevitable, and was, as she fancied, quite prepared for it when the time should come. Nor had she long to wait.

"Now, Hessy," said her cousin, "I am dying to hear all about your mysterious ex-

pedition of last night. What were your dreams like after such a sudden exit?"

"Never mind my dreams, dear; you shall have the solid facts, and see what you think of them. You know, of course, who that horrid creature, Jonas, was, and why he came?"

"I know nothing—positively nothing. Your father refused to say one word; and old Betty's account was all guess-work."

The plain facts were soon told, and listened to with breathless attention. And then, for a moment, there came a silence, during which both ladies went on with their work, as if their very life depended on its instant completion.

"Well, Hessy," said the elder of the two, at last, "it was a hard task for you to go to the Rosery on such an errand."

"But what else could I do, Jennie? There was no other way of escape for papa, and he would not hear of your being consulted. He

said that you would never agree to my going."

"He was quite right, there. I would sooner have gone myself, though it must have been a desperate case to make *me* go."

"Well, Jennie, it was desperate enough. It would have killed him to go into a debtor's prison."

"Killing, my dear, is not so easy a matter as you think. Still, it was a very hard case, and doubly hard for *you*. I suppose that Mr. Fairleigh was very kind?"

"Most kind: most considerate. He smoothed the way for me so that it cost me but a few words at last."

"But you had to ask for money, and to ask *him*?"

"Yes, Jennie, I had; and you seem determined that I shall not forget it in a hurry. But I have stranger news than that for you,"

"Impossible, my dear. Nothing can be strange after such a beginning."

"Wait—wait, till you hear my story, Before I could utter a word as to my mission, more than that I was come as a beggar, he insisted on making, he said, a petition of his own; though he added that mine was granted before it was heard."

"That was slightly rude, Hessy; but yet it showed that he had great confidence in you. Did you grant his petition without hearing it? That would have made the whole thing square, at all events."

"I was obliged to listen, Miss Moreton, in common civility, to gain my own chance. Shall I tell you any more, ma'am; for you seem sadly bored already?"

"You are dying to tell me, Hessy; and I defy you to stop at this agonizing point. Proceed, Miss, directly; if you do not wish me to go out and see Mrs. Biggs, the

washerwoman, who has just passed the window."

Here Betty suddenly appeared at the door, to say that Mrs. Biggs was at hand, and wanted to see one of the ladies.

"Tell Mrs. Biggs to wait," said Hester; "Miss Moreton will see her in five minutes."

"Your budget is not a long one, then, Hussy?"

"As a rule all long budgets are worthless; mine shall at least have the merit of being short; though, after such behaviour, you hardly deserve to hear a word more of it. Mr. Fairleigh *did* present his petition, and though it was rather long, and a little confused, I listened to it all, so that I can pack it into a small space for you. Can't you guess at all what it was like?"

"I have not the faintest conception; how should I? But when a young lady and a middle-aged gentleman take into their heads

to walk up and down an avenue by moonlight, and the gentleman has a petition, it is not about anything as dry as the multiplication-table that they are so intently engaged."

"Jennie, you are a very disagreeable and provoking person, in persisting not to help me one grain in my story. Well, then, he told me that the two past years had been the happiest of his life, because they had taught him to find his truest pleasure lay in the happiness of another person, and that other person was Miss Hester Langley."

"A very romantic and pretty speech, my dear; but was that all, Hessy?"

"Not quite all. He said several other little things—just variations on the same theme——"

"But what did Miss Langley say in reply?"

"She thanked him for all his kind words; said it was agreeable to hear that her hap-

piness had added to that of another person, but that the whole petition had taken her so utterly by surprise that—Whereupon my gentleman turned sharply upon her, and refused to let her add another word, good, bad, or indifferent, until she had taken full and ample time to consider what he had said. Then," continued Hester, "in less than two minutes he had extracted all I had to say on my own behalf, and rushed off to the Manor-house to get the money, and drive those frantic ponies at a tearing gallop all the way down to our gate."

"And did he say nothing more about his own petition?"

"Not a syllable."

"Then, my dear, he considers it settled—'*un fait accompli*,' that is quite clear. May I congratulate you on the happy occasion?"

"You aggravating person, Jennie; will you for once talk a little seriously? instead

of rattling away about *settled* and *accomplished* facts ? ”

“Never more serious in my life, Hessy ; and so was *he*, evidently, from all you tell me. And do you mean to say that you really do not care for him, joking apart, Hessy ? ”

“Care for him is a very wide phrase. I do care for him in a certain way, and up to a certain point ; just as I once used to dislike him ; but I cannot say that I quite love him as a woman should love the man she is going to marry, if that is what you mean.”

“Then why not have told him so ? ”

“Because, my dear, he utterly stopped me from saying another word, and never gave me a chance of alluding to it again. And he has that quiet, firm, way with him that carries all before it in such matters.”

“A capital thing, too, in a man, Hessy —a good, strong, will ; something to guide one, and to rely on.”

“ Unless it happens to meet with another good, strong, will equally slow to give way. What then, Jennie ? ”

“ Oh, then, ‘ *love, honour, and obey* ’ comes to the rescue, and all goes smoothly as a marriage-bell. There, my dear, now you have had your first lesson towards your new duties, and I hope you feel as grateful as you ought. I am glad to hear that he has a will of his own, and knows how to make it effective. I hate your shilly-shally men, who fancy they can carry their point by alternate fits of doubt, and stubbornness, and yielding. Give me one who says what he means, and means what he says ; always supposing, of course, that he is neither a fool nor a bigot, nor a mere strip of selfishness. But, seriously, Hessay, he looks upon the battle as half won, and before long will try to win the other half.”

“ There has been no battle, as far as I can see, my dear, and therefore nothing half

won. A truce was peremptorily demanded, and forced upon me, before I could fire a single gun."

"Nonsense, child ; it was as neat a little passage of arms as could possibly be expected, even by moonlight ; and you may depend on it that the victor went home crowned with laurel, and that his visions last night were of—but I must be off to poor Mrs. Biggs, or old Betty will think I am fairly demented."

Thus ended the first confidential chat between the two girls that had happened for many a day. They had, of course, talked freely enough of all their recent troubles, and of the Captain's special share in them ; but in other matters a quiet reserve had grown up, which was rarely broken. It left Hester much as it found her—anxious, unsettled, hardly knowing her own mind, and certainly not aware as to what amount of encouragement her words on the previous

evening had indeed given to the person who had forced her to speak. She really did like him, and his offer had pleased her—pleased her by its quiet earnestness and delicacy ; though it had indeed taken her so by surprise that she was still puzzled how to answer it.

It was in this frame of mind that after a hasty toilet she strolled into the garden, and thence by a winding path into the upper meadows by the river. Some of her favourite flowers grew in the wood on the other side of the stream, which she had not visited for some time. Crossing, therefore, by the stepping-stones above the waterfall, she hastened through the copse of nut-bushes and furze, and was soon intent on gathering such a bouquet as the woodland afforded, bright with many a cluster of moss, wild service, and ruddy autumnal leaves. It was pleasant work, and for a time, under the music of the babbling river, and the song of

the few birds that here and there still warbled of departing summer, her past troubles were forgotten, and she rambled on in dreamy enjoyment of the present. All at once, however, the sudden discharge of a gun warned her that some sportsman, probably the keeper, was close at hand ; and presently with a rustling dash through the bushes came a brown-eyed spaniel, as if to say his master was not far off. Half fancying that she might be trespassing on some domain sacred to pheasants, she hurried back into a path which she had left, and there found herself face to face with Mr. Tom Russell, who had just missed his bird, and was quietly reloading.

He was not, as usual, in nautical attire, but in an old rough shooting-jacket and Scotch cap, which Hester remembered at the first glance. In her scrambles through the wood some of her sunny hair had escaped from bondage under the straw hat, and

drooped in happy confusion over her face and neck ; exercise had lent a glow to her cheek, and the utter unexpectedness of his appearance added fresh beauty to her roses.

To him, too, the pleasure of the chance meeting was as great as it was unexpected.

“Miss Hester !” he cried out, “this is indeed good fortune. I had just missed a second bird, and was half inclined to go home in despair, and here comes a sudden reward for all my troubles. Let me carry your bouquet for you ? I will not lose a single flower.”

“Thanks, Mr. Russell, I will not trouble you. My bunch of wild flowers is such a hasty, badly-arranged affair, that if I once let it out of my hands it will fall to pieces. But pray do not let me interfere with your shooting. It is full time, I see, for me to be on my way homewards.”

And she stretched out her hand, as if to take leave of the sportsman. But he had

no intention whatever of being left in this fashion.

"I have been hard at work all the morning," he answered, "and am quite weary of it. Besides," he added brightly, "my way homewards, Miss Hester, lies with yours, so that you must, I fear, put up with my poor company for a time."

Unhappily for him, the only path back to the river was narrow and winding; so narrow that of two travellers one must precede the other, the thick bushes making walking abreast impossible; and so winding as every now and then to render conversation even more difficult. Tom saw all this at a glance, as indeed did his companion, but there was no help for him but to make the best of it.

"It is too narrow for me even to offer you my arm, Miss Hester; but I think I must go first to clear the road."

"By all means; but please to keep your

gun pointed the other way, and remember I am not a pheasant."

And so they started. The conversation that followed was broken and difficult; not only by reason of intervening boughs, but the caprice of the lady herself. She made a point of now and then misunderstanding what he said, or of not hearing him at all, and grew more silent and reserved as he became more and more animated and loquacious. Nevertheless, he fought his ship bravely for the time, and persevered in telling her all the best and brightest things in his voyage home; what new sights had fallen in his way in China and Japan; but how, after all, old England seemed the place of all places—the only place, in fact, where a man would care to live.

She seemed to listen to him in a half-listless, half-saucy manner, which alternately charmed and repelled him; that he scarcely knew whether to be pleased with or to

resent. But when they reached the stepping-stones above the fall (which she insisted on crossing without his help), and matters had not in the least mended, his patience was exhausted, and he exclaimed hastily,—

“But I see that I only bother you with all my clumsy stories, Miss Hester; though I used to think, not so very long ago, that my company was not always so wearisome. But a sailor has a poor chance of being remembered when he’s once afloat; new friends, it seems to me, spring up like the blackberries there, and then the old ones are soon forgotten.”

He saw her face flush for a moment as he spoke these words, and would then have gladly recalled them. But it was too late.

Hester herself felt the sting in them, but at first made no reply whatever, until she had cleverly stepped from stone to stone, and reached the opposite bank of the stream. Then she said very quietly,—

"You seem to have been unfortunate, Mr. Russell, in your choice of friends, if they treated you in this dreary fashion, especially if you showed any signs of remembering them when they so readily forgot you. They must have been mere acquaintances—hardly friends?"

"No, no," he answered, still more hastily; "not acquaintances, but friends, old friends. So, at least, they called themselves—once; but they suddenly turned round, and made a mere chance acquaintance into their grand, chief, ally; a man of whom they knew nothing, and nobody seemed to know anything, except that he had plenty of money."

"Not even his name, Mr. Russell?"

"Yes, of course, they knew his name; at all events, the name he went by."

"Well, he could hardly go by a name that was not his own, poor man. I am getting quite interested in him. Was money his only crime?"

"Crime!" he repeated. "I don't say that money is exactly a crime; it all depends how the money is come by. There are many ways of making money you see, Miss Hester, some good and some bad; some straightforward, and some about which the less said the better."

"And this poor gentleman," she inquired, in precisely his own tone of voice, "was he one of the doubtful people who heaped up riches in the wicked way?"

"Well, he made mystery enough of it, for nobody seemed to know who he was, or where his money came from at first. But the truth always leaks out at last, and it was said that he had good reasons for keeping things quiet."

"May I venture to ask who said so? Some of the virtuous, straightforward, people, I suppose?"

"At all events, they were not afraid of letting their friends know who they were,

and where their money came from, as any honest fellow would."

"And did any one ever inquire of this mysterious and evil-disposed personage himself, as to his naughty ways and family connections?"

"That is more than I can say, Miss Hester ; but I should not wonder if he is some day brought to book as he deserves. A craft under false colours, you see, is always in danger of being overhauled by some king's ship or other."

"And Mr. Russell seems to be on board the king's ship, if I may judge by his earnestness and the kindly interest he takes in the criminal's punishment ? It is quite a little romance ; and if one did but know the man——"

"But you *do* know him ; and it's only for your sake and the Captain's, to put you on your guard against such a fellow, that I trouble my head one straw about him."

“My sake?” exclaimed Hester, in well-feigned astonishment; “how in the world can all this business concern me? Pray let me know his name, if he has one.”

“His name is Fairleigh, and, if report speaks truly, pretty well known at The Rosery as friend and adviser, and perhaps something more to Miss Langley herself.”

“Ah, now,” she answered indignantly, “now, Mr. Russell, your riddle gets plainer. I had no idea it could apply to such an unimportant personage as myself. Thanks, a thousand thanks, I am sure, to you and to all the other virtuous people who are so kindly interested in my welfare. The only misfortune is, that Mr. Fairleigh is not here to express his own gratitude. Your company has been most edifying, Mr. Russell, so far; but, like all other pleasant things, it must come to an end. Here we are at the garden-gate; and if you have nothing more

to add to your charming riddle, I will wish you good evening."

But the cool, sarcastic tone in which she uttered these last words was more than he could bear, and he angrily rejoined—

"One thing more I will add ; the man is the son of a felon—a convicted felon ; and if you doubt my words, ask your paragon himself, and see what his answer will be. You have had your warning in time, at all events, and you know now that he is no fit companion for your father's daughter. Is it needful to tell the Captain, or is one warning enough ?"

"Tell my father, Mr. Russell, or tell the whole world, or any one else you please, when you please or how you please. A falsehood will be a falsehood to the end, come in what shape it may ; even if told, as a brave man would tell it, face to face with the accused."

A bright colour came back to her pale

cheek, and a flash to her eyes as she uttered these last defiant words, and left the mate of the *Lapwing* standing outside the garden gate foiled and beaten where he had plotted and hoped for triumphant success. Hester went straight to her room, with trembling hands and an unquiet heart, made a hasty toilet, and came down to dinner with a strange flow of spirits and vivacity of manner which Jennie could not at all make out.

"Why, Hussy, child," said the old man, "you are as gay as a lark to-day. And it's a reward for all your toils and troubles of last night."

"She has been off rambling in the woods, papa," says Jennie, "and met with a good fairy perhaps—who knows?"

"A good fairy indeed," replies Miss Hester gaily, though on the very verge of tears, "one that has opened my eyes a little way at all events, if only to know a true friend

from a false one, and given me a mighty appetite for dinner."

She proved her appetite by eating even less than usual, and even that little with a difficulty she could scarcely conceal from the watchful eyes of her cousin ; but as to her remark about a true friend and a false one, she treated it quite as a joke, from which her two companions might extract what meaning they best could.

For the present, at least, she felt inclined to tell no one of her morning adventure.

CHAPTER VI.

WHAT CAME OF IT.

STABS in the dark are, under the most favourable circumstances, very dangerous things. Like anonymous letters, they are sure, sooner or later, to recoil with more or less fatality on the concoctor's own head. Some annoyance, of course, or even lasting injury, may be inflicted on the victim ; but he is not always the chief or the only sufferer. And so it proved in the present case.

Mr. Tom Russell had had what he thought a good chance, and made the utmost of it ; but look at it from whatever point of view he might, he now seemed to be not a whit the gainer. He had talked over the whole

matter with his old ally Roper, but had received from him little or no consolation.

"I told you before," said the old man to him, "that you were playing with edge tools, and now that you have cut your fingers, you come to me to have them bound up. Nobody will believe your story; not because it may not be partly true, but because you are the teller of it."

"Upon my life, Roper, you are complimentary this morning. I really was not aware until now that people counted me as a liar."

"Nor did I say so, or think so for a moment, you peppery dog. Do you suppose that they are all as blind as Cupid himself, and can't see with half an eye what you know as well as I do, that you are mad with jealousy, and that you hate this man simply because he dares to be in love with the same young lady as Mr. Tom Russell? If he had but taken a fancy to the elder

one, you would never have fashed your beard for a single day."

"You don't know that, Roper, and have no right to say so. The story I brought home is a true one ; and that fellow has no right to marry into an honest family, without letting them know who and what he is. And they shall hear it, too, before long ; all Lipscombe shall hear it."

"How do you know that he is going to marry into the family ? Miss Hester never told you so ?"

"She could not deny it, at all events : I taxed her with the fellow's being her lover, and she said not a word. But lover or no lover, he shall hear my story, and the Captain, too."

This was said in so angry a tone of voice, that the old man, seeing how irate his friend had become, made no reply whatever, for the moment. But presently he rejoined :

"Well, well, Tom, it is of little use to

argue with a man in your hapless condition. You won't hear reason, and you won't take advice. I must try and help you in some other way. The first thing to find out is whether this marriage that you talk of is really coming off or not? That, perhaps, may be done. Meanwhile, all I say is, Do, for heaven's sake, sober down, and keep quiet for a time. You have stirred up fire enough to last till the *Lapwing* sails again, anyhow."

And then the Editor went off to his office.

But sobering down and keeping quiet was just the very thing that the furious lover felt least inclined to do. He was not, however, so infatuated as not to feel, when he came to reflect, that the old man's words were sensible enough, though they had for the time only served to annoy him.

"Go away," Roper had said to him one day, "go away, Tom, and get a few days' shooting on the moor; call on your friends

the gipsies ; have a night or two at poaching, or a quiet bit of smuggling, if such naughty things are ever done now. Anything, to let off the steam, and come to your senses."

"But that," said Russell to himself, "would look as if I were afraid, and dared not back up what I said. I will wait a week at all events, and see what turns up. Either the Captain, or Fairleigh himself, will call upon me by that time, and ask what I mean. It will be time enough, then, to open their eyes."

The week soon went by ; but neither of the two gentlemen called at Russell's lodgings—for the best of all possible reasons, that neither of them had heard a syllable of Hester's secret. She, indeed, had been utterly perplexed as to what was her right and best course. But of Mr. Fairleigh she had seen and heard nothing. He had not called at The Rosery, and, as far as she

knew, had not written to her father, and to *him* she was still unwilling to mention what she had heard—for many conflicting reasons, but mainly because she believed it to be entirely false.

Even to her cousin, between whom and herself there were few secrets, she shrank from telling her trouble; and as the days went by, her resolution to be silent only grew the stronger.

“If this wretched story is true,” she argued to herself, “I shall do no good by repeating it; and if it be false—as I know it is—I will take no part in spreading such an infamous scandal.”

A short and summary line of argument—yet, probably, as wise a conclusion as if it had been reached by the most complicated and lengthy system of logic.

But though, for a time, she thus got partly rid of her trouble, the possession was a painful one, as she more than once con-

fessed to herself, when looking back upon her ramble through the wood.

It was painful to her that the young sailor whom they had known so long—who had professed, at all events, to love her; who had once snatched a kiss from her, and whom she was once inclined to love in return—had been quite as ready to bestow his kisses on a farmer's daughter at the Dingle, apparently to forget her for a couple of years, and then to come home with this mad story of another man's guilt. Besides, what right had he to dictate to her as to her choice of friends? much less to taunt her with being actually engaged? Then, as to Mr. Fairleigh, whom she had learned to hold in such honour and respect, if not to regard with warmer admiration, she was told that he was a mere worthless adventurer, a felon's son, who dared not be known by his right name! And, of this very man, she had gone, alone, to beg for

money ! Look which way she would at the matter, it was alike intolerable. In spite of her disbelief in Russell's accusation, still, into her mind, every now and then, would come the ugly thought of the bare possibility of its being true.

But in the midst of all her troubles, came the one certain fact of good cheer, that the ruin which stared them in the face but a short time before was actually averted ; that her father, whom she dearly loved, had recovered health and spirits—life itself ; and that the future now looked as bright as it had just before seemed dark and dreary. The Rosery was itself again. And, for all this happy change, they were indebted to a friend who, at least, had done them a great kindness, in the noblest and most generous manner. After all, then, it was impossible that such a man could be an impostor. The story was all false.

To what a much larger extent her father

was indebted to this very man for his present sunshine at The Rosery, neither she nor her cousin were as yet aware ; for, even now, the Captain shrank from telling them. All they knew was that no more terrible business letters came, and that the old man's affairs seemed to have settled down into a perfect quiet.

Meanwhile, Fairleigh himself had been far from idle. His agent in the business, after two interviews with the Captain at Dor-mouth, had supplied him with money to satisfy all claimants, and the old sailor could now sleep with a quiet mind. He was once more a free man—free as he had not been for many a long year ; and freedom seemed to have given him a new lease of life and enjoyment. He was deeply grateful to his deliverer, and called more than once at the Manor-house to thank him in person.

“You have added years to my life, Mr.

Fairleigh ; and my only trouble now is, that I cannot thank you as I ought. Is there nothing I can do in return for all your generous kindness ?”

“ One, and only one thing—and that is to keep the whole matter a profound secret. Tell no one—above all, not the ladies at The Rosery, and then I shall be more than content. I need no thanks, and I never wish to hear of the subject again. You talk of repaying me at some future time ; if you still persist in this notion, so be it ; but you must have ample time to make up lee-way, and make no payments until you can really afford to do so. There !—my friend, now we have washed our hands of the whole business for the next twelve months.”

What could such a man as the Captain say in reply to such reasoning as this ? Nothing ; and this, indeed, was his sole answer. He shook hands with his bene-

factor, and went home happier and more light-hearted than ever.

It was seldom that the Captain whistled but for absolute joy of heart, and freedom from all care. But that day, as he marched stoutly along the turnpike road, he whistled as joyously as any blackbird, and his favourite tune of "The Bay of Biscay" had never seemed to him so full of happy music. He passed more than one acquaintance by the way, and had a cheerful nod and a smile for every one. In this fashion he got rapidly over the ground, and had already cleared one of the two miles between Fairleigh's and his own house, when, on turning off at the cross-roads, down Lipscombe Lane, he found himself face to face with the mate of the *Lapwing*.

That young gentleman had been mooning about the country for many days past, in a listless, unhappy state of mind, not knowing what next step to take, and unwilling to

remain idle, so that this sudden encounter somewhat discomposed him.

"Well, youngster," said the old man, "at last we have had a meeting, where, at all events, I did not look for it. Here have you been for weeks ashore, and never turned up once at The Rosery! Where have you been hiding yourself, and what have you been doing?"

At this greeting, Russell, who, in spite of all his brave words, had felt no small trepidation as to the nature of the coming interview, plucked up his courage. "*He* knows nothing as yet—that's clear," he thought to himself, as he answered lightly enough, though not with his usual, easy good-nature :

"I don't know, Captain Langley, that I have been hiding anywhere, if it comes to that; and as to turning up at The Rosery, I do not much care to call where, it seems, I am not welcome."

"What on earth is the matter with you, man? with all your formal '*Captain* Langleys,' 'you don't much care,' and 'not welcome'? This is not your usual style of 'lingo,' Tom Russell! And, for my part, I cannot see what you are driving at. Speak out, man! plain and above-board. If it's 'going into action' that you are bent on, 'clear the decks' by all means. But, first, of all, who said you were not welcome?"

"I don't know that any one *said* so," replied the young man, rather taken aback by this string of questions.

"Then what the deuce do you mean by growling about no welcome? Did you expect us all to be down at the garden-gate, cap in hand, with our best bibs and tuckers on, on the look-out for the first-mate of the *Lapwing*, with 'Pray, walk in, sir; do favour us with a call'? Hang me up to the yard-arm, too, if I know what you are driving at! You were welcome enough

there once, man! as you know; why not *now*?"

"It does not look so, at all events, now, when you have got such great friends, grand friends, rich friends. The wind is soon knocked out of *my* sails, and I drop astern."

"More fool you, then, for not keeping your own place alongside, and biding your time. But as for *great*, and *grand*, and *rich*, I am as much at sea as ever. Who are these tremendous swells, if I *may* ask? many or few, I'll be shot if I know who they are."

"Who they are?" repeated Russell, in an incredulous voice; "that's strange, too, for one of them seems intimate enough, and, if report says true, attentive enough to his young friends at the Rosery, and the Manor-house is not so far out of the track at this very time."

At this, the Captain gave a sudden

whistle, as he answered in an angry tone, "Ho! it's there that the wind sits, is it? The cat is partly out of the bag now, my lad, and I begin to see land. And so you are kind enough to choose my friends for me, are you? Well, I must say it's devilish handsome of you to take so much trouble on my account. If I *may* make so bold, I should rather like to know if, besides being rich and grand, you have any other objection to Mr. Fairleigh?"

"He is no fit company for your daughter, Captain Langley."

"And why not, pray?"

"Do you wish me to tell you?" (Here Langley nodded furiously.) "You *do*? so be it then. Miss Hester——"

"Pray keep my daughter's name out of this business," interrupted the old man fiercely, "and out of your lips too, Mr. Russell. You were speaking of Mr. Fairleigh; stick to your text, man."

"He is the son of a felon—a convicted felon."

"*Mr. Fairleigh the son of a felon?*" roared the old man, in utter amazement; "which of us is mad—I in standing here listening to such intolerable stuff, or you in uttering it? And what proof have you got of your precious indictment, if I might venture to ask for it?"

"Never mind what proof I have got, or have not got. I tell you the truth, and I am no more mad for telling it than you are for refusing to listen."

"I am glad to hear that I am not mad as yet, my superfine gentleman, though I have only your word for it; *your* word, mind you, who prowls about the country ready to stab a man in the dark with a lie that you dare not say to his face."

"What I say now I dare say before any man's face, be he who he may."

"I doubt it—I doubt the whole story;

and as for your proofs, I believe that you haven't a grain of proof to back it up. Tell it to 'the Marines,' boy, not to an old sailor like me. And where was the beggarly falsehood coined, did you hatch it yourself? If so, by the 'living jingo,' I wish you joy of your day's work. If any fellow but you, Tom Russell, had brought me such a rascally budget, I would have kicked the son of a sea-cook over the ship's side, and left him and his rotten yarn to go to the bottom together. As it is, the road is hardly wide enough for us both to sail in company for a single fathom further. If your road lies down the lane, take it; and if your precious piece of slander doesn't choke you by the way, get back to the hole and corner it came from; my road lies on the other tack."

"But it's true for all that," shouts the young man.

"And I say it's a d——d lie; they were

scoundrels and 'swabs' that forged it, and nobody but a scoundrel would believe it."

And with these fierce words, uttered in his loudest and bitterest voice, the old man turned his back upon his companion, and strode hastily away up-hill, back to the turnpike road.

Once there, he sat off at a tremendous pace towards home, utterly forgetting, in the fury of his anger, a short cut across the fields, and thus making a *détour* which brought him to The Rosery a full hour after his time.

When he at last reached home he had somewhat sobered down, but was still in far too great an excitement to touch his supper, though it had long waited for him.

"Give me a pipe," he said, in reply to Hester's repeated entreaties that he would come into the dining-room where supper was laid; "give me a pipe to get the taste of a dirty lie out of my mouth."

"I do not believe," replied she at last, "that you ever had the taste of one in your mouth, papa; though you will go on talking in this mad way. What lie, and who told it? is what I want to know, if it sends you home in this dreadful temper."

"Let me smoke, Hessy, for ten minutes, and then if I have a tongue left you shall hear, my dear, and Jennie too, what sort of sauce I have had for supper. Now make yourself scarce, child, and after supper you shall hear all the story."

In a quarter of an hour the two girls came fluttering down the passage on the *qui vive* of expectation; and Hester herself, if the truth must be told, not without some vague suspicion as to what the lie might be.

They knocked and entered the Captain's state-cabin, and found him smoking away more vigorously than ever.

"Why, papa," said Hester, "you have had your pipe and begun another?"

"It was impossible for me, my dear, to sit here alone and not smoke, with that fellow's lie still ringing in my ears. What lie, and who told it? you say; well, a fellow called Russell, that I met in Five-field Lane, told it; and the lie was that Mr. Fairleigh, up at the Manor-house, was the son of a convicted felon! If that isn't enough to spoil a man's appetite I don't know what is."

"But you know it is all a falsehood," says Hester, with pale cheeks, and a bright sparkle in her eye; "a wicked falsehood."

"Or he ought to be made to prove his words," adds Miss Jennie's cautious voice.

"How is he to prove his words," says the Captain, "if they are all a rascally lie?"

"But are they all false, papa?" replies Jennie; "that is the question. If so, they cannot be proved. Mr. Russell would hardly dare to make up such a tale unless he had proof. If true——"

“My dear Jennie, they cannot be true; they carry a lie on the very face of them. They may do for ‘the Marines,’ as I told him, but not for an old sailor, nor a sailor’s daughter. But it’s for you, Hessy, and for your sake alone, that my gentleman is so concerned! Mr. Fairleigh is no fit company for you, it seems. Confound the fellow’s brazen impudence, I say, for inventing such a beggarly falsehood, and for bringing his precious goods to me, as if I couldn’t take care of my own child! But I gave him a piece of my mind pretty freely, and it will be a long day, I take it, before he shows his nose here again, unless he wants to be kicked out. And now, girls, I have only a word more to say. Let us have done with this wretched business once and for all, and the poor, jealous, fool that invented it. For, proof or no proof, Jennie, Mr. Fairleigh is a man of honour and a gentleman, and such a friend as I never hoped to meet with, and

can never repay. If Tom Russell, or fifty Tom Russells, were ready to swear away his good name, it would be no matter to me, or make me believe a single word of his trumpery lie. So keep your own counsel, girls, and let the slander die out."

Then the trio separated for the night, and each went off to bed, full of troubled thoughts as to the issue of Tom Russell's terrible accusation, which one of the three still believed must have some foundation in fact.

CHAPTER VII.

LITERA SCRIPTA MANET.

A MONTH passed away. Affairs went on much as usual at The Rosery; save that nothing had been seen or heard of Mr. Fairleigh, and no tidings had reached them of any further spread of the scandal. The Captain had never mentioned the subject again, and the girls when they chatted freely of other things shrank from alluding to it, though for entirely opposite reasons; one because she counted it false, the other because she deemed it in some sense true.

"I know the man," Jennie said to herself, "and I know him well enough to be convinced that he would never speak as he has done without book. He may be hasty; he

may be fond of making love to every pretty face he meets, but he is neither a coward nor a knave."

This was the state of things one morning when Fairleigh and his sister sat at breakfast; he meanwhile glancing now and then at one of his pile of letters; the lady intent on the *Lipscombe Gazette*, which, in spite of her brother's edict about country newspapers, she read with devotion every Saturday morning.

"Well, my dear," she suddenly exclaimed, in a voice trembling with excitement, "now, at last, you *will believe* me. Seeing is believing, I suppose. Good heavens! to think of it's being in print!"

"The contents of a newspaper usually *are* in print," replies the barrister. "Is Paul Pry unusually seductive to-day, that you seem so overwhelmed with surprise? Is the Reform Bill carried, or is Mrs. Grundy dead? Is it the invention of a new pill, or the

birth of a baby with three legs, that tickles your fancy so much?"

"When you condescend to be serious, Henry, you will find that it is no such silly joke as you imagine."

"The Reform Bill, or Mrs. Tomkins—a joke? Impossible, my dear."

"Henry, if you can listen to sober sense for one moment, you shall judge for yourself whether I am amazed without a cause or not. Shall I read?"

"So far, my dear, you are dealing in riddles, at which I was never very good, even if Paul Pry himself is the propounder. Read, by all means."

"Listen, then,—*'Our readers will scarcely be surprised to hear that we have good reason for believing that a matrimonial engagement is on the tapis between a certain excellent townsman, learned in the law, and the charming daughter of a certain gallant Captain, whose services to his*

country and to his native town are too well known to need further mention.' If that is a riddle, Henry, all I can say is that the answer to it is a tolerably easy one. Months and months ago I ventured to remark that the young lady in question had her eyes open, and that 'her object was as plain as A. B. C. to everybody in Lipscombe. Now, perhaps, you will believe me. You objected then to the phrase 'a designing young person,' what do you think now?"

"I imagine, my dear, that the young lady in question has about as much to do with that piece of idle, trumpery, gossip as Miss Fairleigh herself; and that her designs, as you are pleased to call them, relate to the man in the moon as much as they do to me. Any lie is good enough for the columns of a country newspaper, in a time of dearth."

"Then, of course, you will write at once and contradict such a falsehood?"

“And so make it of double importance ; gratify the tattling fool of an editor ; and provide a fresh morsel of gossip for his intelligent readers ? No, no ; not quite so infatuated as that, Sarah, however blind I may be as to certain terrible designs. Paul Pry himself shall eat his own words in a style that he is wholly unused to, and before the day is over, too ; or the gentleman learned in the law will know why. Meanwhile, if it be possible, my dear, let your tongue rest for awhile about this wretched gossip, until I have stamped it out. As for that trumpery *Gazette*, burn it at once.”

“It’s all very well, Henry, to talk of burning and stamping out ; you will find it no such easy matter to stop people’s mouths. The gossip, as you call it, is no gossip of mine, but clearly the talk of the town, in which I am the last person in the world to take part or pleasure. By all means stop

the tattlers, if you can. My warning you had months ago."

And with these words the lady swept majestically out of the room. But though her brother had, up to this point, preserved a tolerable equanimity, no sooner was he alone than impatience and anger were stamped on every feature of his face. Hastily catching up the obnoxious paper from the floor, where the lady had cast it, he once more read through the six lines of scandal, but without a particle more relish for them than at first. Then he fell to pacing up and down the room in long, angry strides; next, in short and jerky steps, treading with painful care on certain recurring flowers, stars, and cross-bars in the pattern; but with no result but an increased fury against country newspapers in general, and Paul Pry in particular. For the next ten minutes he tried smoking; but even tobacco failed to bring him any solace; and

then, in desperation, he took hat and stick (a thin rattan), and set out at a good round pace for Lipscombe.

We must, however, outstrip him, and take a look into the rooms of Mr. Sam. Roper, in High Street.

It was publishing-day, and the Editor having been up the best part of the night, had come home to rather a late breakfast, with his friend, Tom Russell. That meal, and some lazy chat being over, the two men for a time stood smoking at the open window, overlooking the meadows, with a clear view of the church in the midst of a clump of elms. Bells were ringing for an early marriage, and the sounds floated gaily into the room.

“Two more wiseacres, Tom,” said the old man, “going to be made one, and after a month of rapture find out that they had better have let it alone. When is your turn coming? Depend on it, my boy, the

only fair marriage scheme would be for a man to be able to try it for seven, fourteen, or twenty-one years, just as he takes the lease of a house — on trial, mind on trial. That would give a fellow a chance."

"Bravo! Roper, bravo!—but if you wait for my turn, you will be as aged and as grey as Methuselah, so that even old Betty will give you up in despair. No, no; the whole lot are a set of false jades that no one can trust—all false alike. There's that pretty, tight, little lass at Dingle Farm, all but mine when I went off on my last trip; and, by Jupiter, when I came back, married—actually married to a great lout of a farmer at Penlee—a fellow with a face like a full moon of beet-root, and arms and legs like a gouty windmill. And when I venture to say good-morning at The Rosery I am bowled out there by a roll of parchment and a long purse; and my lady treats me

like a stranger. That's only two out of the list——"

"And you can give me a dozen, no doubt, Tom? Well, you have been badly treated, I must say."

"It's a rascally business, Roper, from beginning to end. But what about that paragraph for to-day's paper? Is it *in*?"

"*In*? safe enough; and all over Lipscombe by this time. Read it, man; there it is," pointing to a *Gazette* on the sideboard.

It was soon read, pronounced by both parties to be admirably worded, and safe to take a rise out of the gentleman at the Manor-house.

By this time, however, the pipes were finished, and the young sailor strolled down into the town, as *he* said, to hear the news, but in reality to flirt with a very smart and pretty barmaid at the "The Bull." Roper, therefore, was left to his own devices, and for some half-hour had been busy at a new

hand-bill for *The Auriphonic Ear-wash*, when the servant brought him a card, with a message that the gentleman was at the door, and wished to see Mr. Roper.

"Show the gentleman in, Mary; and if anyone else calls, say I am engaged."

Then the little Editor again glanced at the card—again read the name, "*Mr. Fairleigh*," and looked uneasily at the door, as if he scented coming evil.

The owner of the card lost no time, but entering the room very quietly, asked, in his blandest manner, if he had the pleasure of speaking to Mr. Roper, the Editor of the *Lipscombe Gazette*.

Mr. Roper, in reply, bowed assent, and pointing to a chair, still uneasily, begged his visitor to be seated.

"Thank you, Mr. Roper; my business is a very brief one, and I prefer standing. I see you have a copy of the *Gazette* on the table, and it is a short paragraph in that

paper which brings me here. If you will allow me, I will read it to you."

"By all means, Mr. Fairleigh; I only wish that you would take a chair."

Again declining to be seated, his visitor read the paragraph aloud, and then added, in a calm, clear voice—

"I am right, I believe, in supposing that Mr. Fairleigh of the Manor-house is the gentleman alluded to in this paragraph?"

"My dear sir, you are quite at liberty to suppose anything you please, or think proper, in the case."

"Quite so, Mr. Roper; but you being the author of that paragraph, the editor of the paper, and so far answerable for any statement of fact which it contains—you intended to allude to Mr. Fairleigh, as everyone in Lipscombe who cares to read it, will at once understand you to do."

"My dear sir, I cannot possibly be answerable for what——"

"I want a plain answer to a plain question," interrupted the barrister. "You either meant to allude to me or to some other person ; if not to me, to whom did you mean to allude ?"

This was a poser ; and at last extracted the reluctant answer—

"That he supposed Mr. Fairleigh was the person alluded to."

"And the lady intended in the next line is, I presume, Captain Langley's daughter ?"

"Yes ; I suppose you are correct there, also."

"And you have a good reason, you say, for making a certain statement about those two persons ? May I ask what that reason is ?"

"It is the common talk of the town."

"You have yourself, then, heard it talked of by other people ?"

"Certainly."

"Will you be good enough to give me the name of any one such person?"

"Really, Mr. Fairleigh, I cannot undertake to betray any confidence reposed in me, even if I could remember any such name."

"Betray confidence, sir! about a matter that is the common talk of the town? If you have heard dozens of people mention this matter, out of them all you must surely remember one; and I am not unreasonable, since you shift the burden to others, in asking for that single name? It is only what one gentleman has a right to demand of another under such circumstances. The matter intimately concerns me, and I hardly think you can refuse my request."

Roper felt that the ground was being cut quietly away under his feet by a mode of treatment to which he was altogether unaccustomed, but from which he could not escape without an open rupture, and was at

last compelled to mention the name of "his friend, Mr. Russell" (he being, in fact, the only person who had ever mentioned, even remotely, the matter under debate).

"Thanks, Mr. Roper; I was sure you would at last see the matter in a proper light. And now, until I can meet with this Mr. Russell, I must simply inform you that the paragraph in question is false from beginning to end. Rumour, as usual, is a liar, and your friend has stated that which has no other foundation but his own fertile brain. The next step may not be quite so easy; but being imperatively necessary, must be taken at once. In a second edition of the *Gazette*, which must be published forthwith, the falsehood must be cut out, and in its place must be inserted these few words—

"The Rumour of an intended Marriage alluded to in our impression of this morning was ABSOLUTELY WITHOUT FOUNDATION; and

we issue this Second Edition at once to contradict it in the most emphatic manner.' ”

“ But, my dear sir,” urged the Editor, a second edition is impossible—simply impossible.”

“ Not to a man of brains, and energy like Mr. Roper. I know that it will put you to considerable expense, and demand an hour or two of hard work—say, twenty pounds. Here is a note which will, I think, provide for both these necessities; and it is of course for me to take care that the means are ready. I am ready to go with you to the office at once, if I can be of the slightest service.”

All this was said in such a calm, measured, and assured voice, that Roper in spite of himself gave way to the “impossible” arrangement, and went down to the office with his visitor to get out a second edition. The type had not been “distributed,” and they went to press with the new paragraph within an hour.

"I have to thank you, Mr. Roper," said Fairleigh, as he took leave, "for so promptly acceding to my request, and to beg that you will take care that copies of the new edition are sent at once to every subscriber, I of course being answerable for the entire expense. I have now only to see Mr. Russell that this miserable scandal may be stopped. Have you any notion where he is to be found?"

"He went into the town an hour ago, but possibly may have gone back to my house, where, as I suppose you know, he lodges. Further than that I can say nothing."

And so they parted

A short walk brought Fairleigh back to the house in High Street ; and there, as luck would have it, he found the mate of the *Lapwing*.

"Mr. Russell, I presume," he said, bowing as he entered the room. "I shall be glad, Mr. Russell, if you can spare me five minutes

when at leisure, and I will make my visit as short as I possibly can."

"The shorter the better," was the gruff answer.

"Good ; I will begin at once. In the *Lipscombe Gazette* of this morning there is a paragraph about a rumoured marriage, which, as I have just now proved to the Editor, is entirely without foundation, and which he is now sending out a second edition to contradict. He tells me that he inserted it on the authority of his friend, Mr. Russell, and I now venture to ask on what ground you made any such statement ?"

"I don't know," replied the sailor, "that I am obliged to give any reasons for what I say to my friends in private."

"But this, you see, is a public statement which affects me, made in the most public manner, and on your authority. It has ceased to be private, and become so in consequence of your own words. Now, you

either spoke on some clear grounds for supposing the statement to be true, or without any such grounds. In the latter case—which I cannot for a moment imagine a possible one—your words were unjustifiable ; in the former, I have a right to ask on what authority you spoke.”

“And suppose I decline to answer ?”

“I cannot suppose such a thing for a moment. You have made, or caused to be made, a certain public statement concerning me, which I assert to be utterly false. Is it unreasonable to ask why you assert it to be true ? I ~~ask~~ you this in private. Are you aware ~~that~~ I can ask it in an open court of justice, and that some answer must there be given ?”

“By all means go to law if you wish it,” replied Russell, getting more sulky as he found himself getting the worst of it.

“But I do *not* wish to go to law, sir, and for a plain reason that ought to satisfy even

you, that another person is mixed up with this wretched gossip, whom I have no right to drag into a public discussion."

"Ask that person then yourself, and see what her answer will be. I tried it, and could get nothing from her, and so I concluded that my guess was a true one."

"Was that your only reason for speaking as you did?"

Then followed a silence, which the sailor, now more angry than ever, was at last compelled by his cross-examiner to break, and reluctantly admit that this was his only distinct reason for speaking as he had done.

"I understand, therefore," said Fairleigh, rising to go, "that your plan of action in such matters is this. You wish to put into circulation some silly and false report about your neighbours, and you mention it to the editor of a public print in such a way as to induce him to treat it as actually true. Being taxed by the slandered person with this in-

genious method of propagating falsehood, and asked for your authority, you are at last driven to own that your sole ground for speaking was a lady's silent contempt for an impertinent question, as I shall presently inform her. Such conduct, sir, is unknown among gentlemen. Any further comment on my part is unnecessary."

With these words Mr. Fairleigh quitted the room, and left the mate of the *Lapwing* to his reflections. But his own day's work was by no means over ; and having obtained a copy of the second edition of the *Gazette* at the office, he at once set out for The Rosery.

What befell him there deserves a place in a new chapter to which we hasten, after glancing for a moment at Mr. Tom Russell, as he ponders on the events of the last hour.

He had come back from his interview with the smart belle at the Black Bull in high spirits, at his own success with that charming

young person, but only to find himself snubbed and quietly checkmated by an enemy whom he thought to be defeated and slain. The fellow, too, had not only defeated him, but left the field with honours. And, as usual in such cases, his only resource was to throw the blame of defeat on his friend, rather than himself. "It's all owing to that old muddler, Sam Roper. Second edition, indeed! Not content with being outwitted by that sneak of a lawyer, he must needs go and publish his failure to the whole world."

CHAPTER VIII.

FAIR PLAY.

“So far so good,” was Fairleigh’s comment to himself on his morning’s work, as he walked hastily through the narrow woodland lanes towards The Rosery. I have at all events brought those two mischief-makers to book, in spite of all their shuffling; the Lipscombe gossips will soon find out that Paul Pry’s dictum won’t always stand even in print; and that marriages, if not made in heaven, are at all events not made in High Street.

But his next step in the business was not so clear, though he had set out boldly to take it without delay. He had clearly determined to see Hester Langley at once, and tell her

frankly what he had done. For some considerable time he had carefully avoided her presence, and when he chanced to meet the Captain had eschewed all allusions to his proposed suit, and every topic that seemed likely to lead to it. Not a word had been said by him as to the old man's freedom from debt, or his deliverer's bondage in the toils of Cupid.

To Langley, indeed, the master of the Manor-house seemed to be quietly backing out of the proposed alliance ; and nothing but his own sense of delicacy, and unwillingness to touch on what his friend so plainly avoided, had kept him silent. But the cause of this silence was anything but what he supposed. So far from backing out of his implied engagement, Fairleigh was more than ever determined to prosecute it. He was not the man to speak hastily or prematurely in such a matter ; and the love that he professed for Hester Langley was as deep and ardent as

ever. The more he thought of her, the more convinced had he become that she was a woman after his own heart, and the more determined to win her for a wife. Up to that time he had purposely delayed speaking again to her, that what he had done for her father might as it were drift aside for the time, and leave her free to decide and to act unfettered as far as possible by any feeling of gratitude, or by any feeling indeed but that of personal like or dislike.

But this sudden paragraph in the *Lipscombe Gazette* had upset all his plans, and set him adrift on a sea of doubts and fears which had to be resolved at a minute's notice. It was clear to him that something had to be done at once ; and he had set out to do it, hardly knowing in what exact way, and puzzled as to what its result might be. Of one thing, however, there was no doubt in his own mind : she must be told by himself that with this miserable scrap of newspaper scandal

he had not even the remotest possible connection, and that the Manor-house had been as much amazed at it as The Rosery. Again and again during his walk he had looked at this point of the question in every light ; and as he once more decided that his course was so far clear, he found himself at the well-known gate, and that the time for action was come.

There was no need to ask if Miss Hester was at home, for there she stood, not ten yards away, in the trimmest and daintiest of garden hats and aprons, doing her best to cut a bouquet of autumn flowers, to receive which a newspaper lay stretched out on the top of a garden seat. That newspaper was the *Lipscombe Gazette* of that morning, which the whole party at breakfast had read and discussed but an hour or two before.

Hester, hearing steps approaching, turned suddenly to meet him, in her usual frank and bright manner ; and, as they shook hands,

his quick eye caught sight of the title of the newspaper, and he took it for granted that the ground had been broken.

"I am fortunate, Miss Hester," he said, "in finding you alone, for it makes my task an easier one. I see that you have a copy of to-day's *Gazette* there, and I suppose you have read a certain silly paragraph in it, which some busybodies in Lipscombe have invented in this time of dearth?"

Then Hester's heart beat fast, as it whispered to her what her visitor's object might be; and it was not without some unsteadiness of voice that she answered—

"Yes, we all read the paper at breakfast."

"If you saw *the* paragraph, I need then scarcely assure you that I had no hand in its concoction; and that it amazed me as much as it did Miss Langley herself."

"You were the last person in the world that we should have suspected of any such a——" And here she paused, at a loss how

to express her exact meaning. But he immediately added—

“ ‘Manœuvre,’ just the very word to characterise the affair. Thanks, Miss Langley, for thinking me incapable of dealing with your name in any such a fashion. And, of course, I openly contradicted the paragraph the moment it was pointed out to me. Was I right in doing so ? ”

“ Beyond all doubt, Mr. Fairleigh.”

“ Especially as it was utterly false ? ”

“ Quite so.”

“ I could do nothing else, you think ? ”

“ No, I think not.”

“ I hope, then, that you will approve of my next step in at once seeing the two persons, Roper and his friend, who fabricated the precious scandal, forcing the one who set the thing afloat to own that it was entirely without foundation, and the other to contradict it in a second edition of his paper, which to-day will be in the hands of all his

subscribers. There," he added, taking the *Gazette* from his pocket, "is the fellow's confession under his own hand and seal. I only trust it may teach even Paul Pry not to deal in falsehoods for a month or two at least. But lying is so easy and so profitable to these wretched scribblers as to become almost second nature. The contradiction is, you see, as strong as words could make it, Miss Hester, but not, I think, too strong for the facts of the case. What is your opinion?"

"I think it always best to speak plainly," said Hester, smiling as she spoke; "and as the man had to eat his own words, it was well to have no further mistake about the matter."

"Just so," said her visitor; "a scotched snake soon recovers. But in this case, I think we have fairly settled the reptile, and may safely leave him to his own devices. And now my troublesome business is over,

and your charming bouquet can be completed."

For a moment Hester doubted whether her visitor's mission was indeed all accomplished, or whether they had only just got through the opening scene. But a single glance at his face convinced her that he had really said his say, and that her heart had been, for this time at least, under a false alarm. It was lucky, however, that she had the bouquet to turn to, and was thus able, in a search for fresh flowers, to keep her trembling fingers well employed under the gaze of a keen pair of eyes that watched her every movement.

As for Mr. Fairleigh himself, he seemed totally unembarrassed, and in one of his brightest moods; chatting gaily about flowers, autumnal tints, and fiery leaves, and carefully avoiding all allusion to Paul Pry, and the special cause of his visit.

Hester soon managed to fall in with his

cue, and to give herself for the time to such topics as he seemed bent on pursuing. She talked gravely about annuals, and creepers, and evergreens ; the best way to get rid of weeds in the path, and dandelions in the grass-plot; all the while, however, thinking of other things, and wondering why the science of gardening suddenly seemed so attractive to her companion, and why he so resolutely avoided all mention of Jennie, or her father's affairs, in which she knew that the barrister had been so busy and so generous. But, in spite of all her surmises, he kept steadily to horticulture, which, like most other things, she thought he had at his fingers' ends, until the swing of the garden-gate announced the arrival of another visitor, and this was the Captain himself.

Then Hester managed to escape into the house with her flowers, and left the two gentlemen to their own devices.

The old man received his visitor very cor-

dially, and was rather amazed, as well as amused, when he heard the 'cause of his friend's visit.

"A couple of such mean, pettifogging gossips," he said, in allusion to Paul Pry and his friend, "deserve no quarter, much less such treatment as you gave them. As for Roper, scandal seems the very breath of his life; and a good rope's-ending would do him a world of good.

"Hardly worth the rope, my friend," replied Mr. Fairleigh; "but he had to eat his own words, in plain print, too; and he ate them quietly enough at last. The young sailor was rather more fierce, but I got out of him in the end that his sole ground for inventing the precious morsel of scandal was some impudent query to your daughter, which she did not choose to answer except with silence. He growled and blustered a little, but I left him with the single remark that conduct like his was unknown among

gentlemen ; and came off at once to show to you the *Second Edition*, as well as to your daughter."

"I knew it was no handiwork of yours, the moment I set eyes on it, Mr. Fairleigh ; though I thought you might, perhaps, have taken advantage of it to say a word for yourself to Hester. In my days of courting we did things, you see, in a different fashion ; for you seem to say now that the whole thing is a falsehood, and there is an end of the matter."

"No, no," interrupted his visitor, "by no means an end ; but Miss Hester must be trapped into no false position by the plot of a couple of idle busybodies. Nothing would be greater joy to me than the truth of any such paragraph ; but I cannot purchase the wish of my heart at her expense, or allow her name to be mixed up with a lying newspaper report, even for my own benefit. Whenever her name is coupled with mine in

print, it must be with her own knowledge and consent, known first to me, and then the rest of the world may do as they like with it—if she has no objection. I am still as much in earnest as ever, Captain Langley, about asking her to be my wife ; but I must win her for myself, and by myself, without Paul Pry's help, and without a thought of being a debtor to me as her father's friend."

"By all means, then, win her, if you can," replied the old man ; "and I wish you every success ; though I am afraid you will not get the credit you deserve for all these high notions. In my day, you see, we young men went to work in a different fashion ; and if the enemy made a false move, his opponent took advantage of it in a moment, and laid siege to the castle with flying colours."

"Yes, yes, my friend, that was all very well for a young man, especially a smart sailor ; but here am I a weather-beaten fellow

of forty-odd years, and I must stand upon firmer ground than the mistakes of an enemy—if I really have one.”

“That, I am afraid, you have, Mr. Langley, and it is well for you to know it; though I don’t imagine that he will show his face here again in a hurry, after my last interview with him. The fellow is clearly going to the bad; and the less Hester has to do with him, the better for her. So the coast is clear for a better man.”

Nothing could [be more cordial than the old man’s manner, and his visitor took leave of him with many expressions of gratitude.

“I shall bide my time, Captain Langley, and when that comes I must hope to win the prize by straightforward fair play. My life has been cloudy enough so far; and I cannot afford to lose even a single chance of sunshine.”

And so they parted; the barrister to report progress at the Manor-house, and his

friend to chat over the second edition of the *Gazette*.

When Fairleigh reached his own house, he was in a good condition for his dinner, which he felt that he had well earned ; and in a good humour with his sister, whom he expected to find in a state of virtuous indignation, and whom he knew he still had to enlighten as to his day's work. The battle would be a tough one, he knew from old experience, but he was flushed with victory, and came down to dinner ready for the fight, and by no means unwilling to join battle.

No sooner was the table cleared, and the two were quietly busy with the dessert, than he at once began the fray by saying, in his cheeriest voice—

“ Well, my dear, here is a second edition of the *Gazette*, and your friend, Paul Pry, is as lively as ever. I must read to you what he says : ”

“ ‘The rumour of an intended marriage, alluded to in our impression of this morning, was *absolutely without foundation*, and we issue this second edition at once to contradict it in the most emphatic manner.’ ”

“Read it once more,” replied the lady ; “I can scarcely believe my own ears, after your words of this morning. Are you really in earnest ?”

“Quite, Sarah ; you may safely believe your own ears ; and my first step after seeing this in print was to carry it straight to The Rosery, and read it to the person whom it mainly concerned, and then to her father.”

“My dear brother, allow me to say that you have acted with the most admirable good sense in thus putting an end to a piece of idle falsehood, and the schemes of a most dangerous——”

“Stop, stop, my dear ; I have put an end to newspaper tattle, as I fully in-

tended, and as the case required; but if you mean by dangerous schemes all hope of an alliance with Captain Langley's family, you are altogether in the wrong. I have now laid down the foundation, I trust, on a much surer basis; and when I ask Miss Hester Langley to be my wife, I hope more strongly than ever that I shall not ask in vain."

"What! after being the talk of the neighbourhood, and yourself contradicting this rumour of an engagement, again becoming entangled in a noose, which you have only just managed to escape? You never can be so utterly infatuated, a man of your sense, and at your time of life!"

"Such is the exact state of the case, my dear, and so great is my infatuation! Love is a disease from which even old age cannot hope always to escape, and older men than your brother have become its happy victims."

"More shame, then, to them, and to a man who ought to know better by this time than to rush into such an extreme of folly! I have no patience with such madness."

"So it seems, Sarah; but don't be too rash in passing sentence on yourself. You see my helpless condition. No age, or sex, or previous views, are proof against the charmer. At all events, wait until Mr. Suitable comes. Remember that

"Even at threescore Belinda felt the smart
Of Love's inevitable dart,
And murmuring, 'I will ne'er relent,' relented;
And sighing, 'I will ne'er consent,' consented."

"Thank you, Mr. Fairleigh, thank you! But, however old or ridiculous I may be, I am not yet sixty, and, in spite of all your poetry, not likely to make a fool of myself when I am."

"All in good time, my dear Sarah, all in good time. With my sad example before you, there is no knowing when, or how

rapidly, all these icy resolutions of yours may melt under the sunny flame of Dan Cupid ; but happen when it may, I promise you my best wishes and heartiest congratulations."

Then, for the second time that day, Miss Sarah Fairleigh rose from her chair in haste, and swept from the room in her most dignified and majestic manner.

"I will listen no longer," she exclaimed, "to such trifling as this ; and can only wonder that you find in it any excuse for your own folly."

The master of the house opened the door for her with more than his usual politeness, and went calmly back to his easy-chair by the crackling wood-fire, to think over the events of the day. It had been an eventful day, and he had more than once doubted whether his course of action was a wise one or not. But the step was now taken beyond recall, and he must abide by it, whatever the

issue might be. Stage by stage he reviewed his work, and on the whole was content; though he admitted to himself that the scheme involved no small risk.

"Thus stands the case," he reasoned to himself. "I have told the woman whom I love—the only woman I can ever love—that the rumour of an engagement between us is altogether without foundation, and driven her to admit that at present it is a falsehood, which I did right in contradicting; that, in short, I could do nothing else; if not for my own sake, at all events for hers. Then, on the other hand, she knows that my only rival set the lie afloat, to suit his own designs, and dragged her name into print, in a fashion which no one who really loved her would dare to adopt. By this means he has certainly fallen in her estimation, and in exact proportion to his loss is my gain."

Having reached this pleasant conclusion,

Mr. Fairleigh quietly finished his bottle of claret, went upstairs in search of some coffee ; and, in a serene frame of mind, determined, if possible, to propitiate the offended deity of the drawing-room.

CHAPTER IX.

DOWN-HILL.

“I TELL you what it is, Tom Russell, the best thing that could happen to you would be a two-years’ cruise, under a good, tight captain—a fellow who would laugh you out of the blue devils, and keep your hands from mischief, with plenty of hard work. All this mooning about the country, with a gun in your hand, and idling in the town without one, week after week, and month after month, is fairly taking the starch out of you, and turning a smart sailor into a melancholy loafer, in search of a day’s pay.”

So spake the Editor of the *Lipscombe Gazette*.

"Upon my life," replied the person addressed; "upon my life, Roper, you are, as usual, deucedly complimentary to your friends; and, if all else fails, you might set up for a local preacher to the idlers down on the beach on Sunday afternoons. But your sermon doesn't suit me, my friend. The *Lapwing* is in dock for repairs, for six months good; and meanwhile I don't feel inclined for another cruise, even under your model captain, and his cure for the blue-devils. I have had enough of salt water for the present. Besides, you incomparable old humbug! it was only a month or two ago when you yourself did nothing but preach to me the good to be derived from a week's fishing, or a holiday on the moor; and now, when I take your advice, you turn round and improve the occasion!"

But, though Roper made no answer to this tirade, it was hardly a true version of Mr. Russell's course of proceeding. Playing

billiards at "The Black Bull" till nearly midnight, with half-a-dozen young fast men, who, like himself, were troubled with more idle time and money than wit; drinking brandy-and-water at the bar, and flirting with the smart damsel who dispensed it; or smoking away whole mornings on the beach among boatmen and idlers in search of a job—could hardly be counted as healthy exercise or change of scene on the moor. But, in addition to this, ugly reports had begun to get about the town as to young Russell's being in some way mixed up with a series of poaching expeditions and salmon-spearing by night, that had taken place on a part of the river belonging to the lord of the manor, Mr. Fairleigh. On more than one of these occasions, stubborn fights had resulted between the keepers and the poachers, among whom one of Fairleigh's men asserted positively that Tom Russell was present, and a ringleader, though he

declined to swear to his identity before the magistrate. The young sailor, therefore, was not included in the indictment, though his name "came up" more than once in the course of the trial which ensued.

He was said to have been there disguised in the clothes of a "navvy;" and to this precaution, no doubt, he owed his escape. The matter was widely talked of in the town, but so passionate and so morose had the young man of late become, that of all his friends and acquaintances the only one who had dared to mention the subject to him was Roper. And a sulky reply was all that even he got for his pains.

"I thought, Roper, that you were up to everything, and knew everything about everybody. If I *was* there, let them prove it. That's all I say. But I can't see what the deuce the *Lipscombe Gazette* has to do with the matter. You are not going to paragraph me, I suppose? Another *second edition*,

without the fifty pounds, will hardly suit your book. Eh?"

From this it will be plainly seen that the first mate of the *Lapwing* had not yet either forgotten or forgiven the appearance of a certain other paragraph in print, and the circumstances which preceded and followed it. In fact, it had lain rankling in his mind ever since; and in secret, as he often confessed to himself, he was only biding his time to be duly revenged on both his enemies, as he called them, at The Rosery, or the Manor-house. How soon, or in what exact way he was to attain this desire of his heart, or even what personal advantage would accrue therefrom to himself, he would have been puzzled to say. But the thought of revenge was pleasant to him; almost, he said, the only consolation he had; and he cherished it like a bosom friend. When it is so with a man, sooner or later the devil takes care that some opportunity for gratifying the evil passion

comes in the very nick of time. And so it fell out with Russell.

After the poaching trial was over, a fresh series of depredations began to be committed on the Fairleigh property. The best pools in his part of the river were limed, and fish destroyed by the hundred ; his young trees were cut down, and the flower-gardens near the house wantonly laid waste, and stripped of such few blossoms as the autumn had left to winter's care. In spite of careful watching, and the offering of many rewards, the author of these outrages could not be discovered—a fact at which Russell made no secret of expressing considerable satisfaction.

“A *second edition*,” he would say to Roper, “won't wipe out that for him anyhow. I hear that his upper plantation was half stripped last night, and of course it's Mr. Nobody again.”

“And some day, my boy,” replies the old man, “Mr. Nobody will be caught, and a

pretty fool he will look with his hair cut short, after six weeks' hard labour on the treadmill."

"Never mind, he is not caught yet ; and the 'swell' for once is getting the worst of it, as he deserves. He had his crow over us, Roper, so it's all fair for his turn to come now. Couldn't you manage to touch him up again with a short paragraph of regret at these shameful proceedings, and the serious injury, &c., &c.?"

"Thank you, Mr. Thomas Russell ; thank you for the suggestion ; but my last encounter with the gentleman you love so well was quite enough for me, even if it didn't satisfy you ; and I must say that you do not seem to have gained much by the transaction."

"At all events, I made him say openly there was no truth in the report about his being engaged to old Langley's daughter ; and after that, he is not likely to have begun his love-making again, nor the lady either ;

and, like a fool, he went straight off to tell her of his contradicting it ; and that is something gained, anyhow."

"Well, in point of fact, you see, Tom, the gentleman is more attentive there than ever. He is at The Rosery, so I hear, two or three times a week, though love-making may be all at an end, as you say."

"And who on earth told you that, Roper ? I, for one, don't believe a word of it, wherever you picked up your news."

"Never mind where I picked up the news, if it is true. A shilling is a shilling whatever mint it comes from. I tell you again, as I have told you before, this man Fairleigh is not one to be meddled with, and you had better let him alone. It's clear now that your chance is gone."

"That," interrupted Russell, "is just the point that is not so clear ; at all events, they shall know who and what he is."

"But they do know it, if telling will teach

them ; and it's plain that they don't believe your story."

"He shall hear it, Roper, himself some day, and then let him deny it if he can. 'Brag' is a good dog, but 'Hold-fast' is a better one, as he shall find out to his cost."

Sparring matches of this kind between the two friends were now of frequent occurrence ; but they were as fruitless of good to the young sailor as the one which we have just detailed, and which sent him off into the town for an evening's idleness, at an earlier hour than usual.

It was from about this time that Tom Russell began to go down-hill, and that people began to notice that he did so. He had been used to associate with some of the best classes of residents in Lipscombe ; but now, more and more, he chose his companions from those altogether below him, among whom idling, drinking, and smoking, were the main business and plea-

sure of life ; and he soon became chief and ringleader. The end of this decadence was, that one by one the best houses in Lipscombe were gradually closed against him ; mammas with marriageable daughters fought shy of the mate of the *Lapwing*, in spite of his good looks, and his prospect of being some day a captain, wherever they chanced to meet him.

At first my gentleman did not care to believe, and refused to acknowledge this ; until cut direct followed cut direct, and “ not at home ” succeeded to “ not at home,” in so pointed and rapid a fashion as to leave no possible doubt, even on his own mind, that in some way or other he had lost caste. Harden himself as he might, and as he did, against the conviction, he felt that it was true ; though he outwardly professed to Roper that “ the whole business was nothing to him, and that he did not care a rap whether the swells cut him or not, or what he had done to offend the whole pack of women.”

But though it was easy enough to make light of "the pack of women," as he called them, the loss of such society at this time was the very worst loss that could have befallen him. He had been a favourite among the ladies, young and old, for many a year ; and intercourse with them gradually helped to refine and soften him in tone, manner, and taste where he most needed it. And it was in these very respects, by which he had once learned to make himself winning and agreeable, that he now began to change for the worse.

There is no need to trace the steps of his descent any further ; it was very gradual, but in the end affected him in tone, manner, dress, and mind. Some few of his old friends now and then said a kindly word to him, but the majority avoided him ; and before long he learned to avoid them ; so that the worthless idlers of the town became almost his only associates. This soon grew to be

notorious, and in due time the news made its way to The Rosery, where his name had of late been seldom heard.

Old Betty had come back one day from the town, full of his misdoings, and was giving a flaming account of them to her handmaid, when Miss Jennie chanced to enter the kitchen—at these words,—

“He’s at the bottom, so they do say, of every scrap of mischief that goes on for miles round; and upon my life, he looks like it, he do.”

“And who,” said the lady, “is this awful criminal, Betty, if I may ask?”

“Well, Miss Jennie, you might guess from this to Christmas afore you pitched upon the right man, and sorry enough you’d be, too, if you did. It’s just that young Tom Russell; and if he wasn’t ashamed of hisself to be seen, I was ashamed to set eyes on him.”

Her questioner’s grey eyes grew sad as

she heard this, though she answered bravely enough,—

“That’s bad news, Betty; but what was he like, and how was he changed—your old favourite, too,—to make you ashamed of him?”

“What was he like, miss? A-marching down High Street he was, arm-in-arm with two raffish young chaps—shop-boys, or that sort—with his hat a-cocked a one side, and a short pipe in his mouth; and, ‘Well old mother Hubbard,’ he says, ‘and how is all the swells?’ he says, ‘and have the bailies broke into the house agen? and my best respects to dog Toby;’ and with that, my dear, they went off a-staggering and a-swaggering down the street like three drunken taidors. That’s what he was like, miss.”

“Enough to make anyone ashamed of him, Betty.”

This was all Miss Jennie said in reply to the old woman’s wretched picture, which

haunted her mind for many a long day until, in one of her rambles along the cliff, she happened herself to meet the hero of it in scarcely a better condition than Betty had painted. She had been calling at one of the Preventive houses, to see a sick woman, when, as she made her way back by the path above "Brewer's Cave," she suddenly came upon a man who was lounging against the stile leading into some path-fields. It was hardly possible to pass him unnoticed; and, for a moment, so changed was he in dress, manner, and appearance, that only the faintest suspicion entered her mind as to who he was. But, in another second, the question was put beyond all doubt.

"Well, my dear," cried out a well-known voice, "here I am, quite alone, and charmed to see you. Give us a kiss, my darling—only one."

And then, staggering towards her, the

fellow made an attempt to grasp her dress, as she answered in her boldest tones,—

“Touch me, if you dare, you drunken——
Good God ! It never *can* be Tom Russell ?”

“Tom it is, and no mistake, my dear ;
and you so pat with my name, too. Who
are you ?”

But there was no need to answer the question ; for as he glared at her with half-tipsy gravity, his face suddenly turned ashy pale, as he cried out,—

“Upon my soul, Miss Jennie, I didn’t know it was you. I didn’t know it was a lady, but thought it was only one of the women from the cottages down there.”

“Worse and worse,” said the girl, in slow, grave accents ; “can this be the man whom I once knew ? So changed as *this* ? No wonder I hardly knew you !”

“Am I so changed then, Miss Jennie ?” he replied, taking a pipe from his mouth as he spoke, and sobering down with excessive

mortification. And then impudently adding, "I wonder you are not quite ashamed to speak to me."

"Why should I be ashamed to speak to an old friend? I am not changed, at all events, however much you may be altered."

"Oh no," he answered roughly, "it's not Tom Russell that is altered, but his old friends; the genteel mammas, and the very proper young ladies, and their grand, rich, acquaintances, are the people to give me the cold shoulder, and cross over to the other side of the street when they see me coming—as if I had got the plague—with their cursed pride! I am as good as they are, anyhow; a gentleman's son, and first mate of as good a ship as floats under the Union Jack. But you have cast me off like the rest, I suppose; I can see it in your face and looks. Speak out at once, Jennie Moreton."

"Not cast you off yet, Mr. Russell; nor

likely to do so, till you cast yourself off. But as to your being as good as your old friends who give you the cut direct instead of a welcome, and fit company for decent people, how can that be when I find you as I do now, here at twelve o'clock in the day, lounging about in the sun, out at elbows, half tipsy, with a short pipe in your mouth, and ready to insult any lone woman who falls in your way, with the beggarly excuse that you did not know she was a lady? Tom Russell, you *are* changed, and changed for the worse ; with nobody but yourself to thank for it."

"Just what all the swells say ; just what everybody is saying," he answered, with a vague uneasy tone of trembling bravado in his words.

"Then for once," she quickly answered, "for once, mind, everybody is in the right. I can remember the day when the Tom Russell I once knew would as soon have

thought of firing his ship as getting drunk in broad daylight with idle shop-boys and apprentices ; or lounging about the road-side to insult the first woman who came by alone. He was neither a coward nor a fool ;—stop, man, stop, I have not done yet—neither a coward, nor a fool, nor a slanderer ! ”

“ No slanderer ! ” he fiercely interrupted ;
“ no slanderer ! I’ll swear to that, anyhow.
It’s true, every word of it.”

“ What is true ? ”

“ That your grand friend up there ” (pointing in the direction of the Manor-house) “ is the son of a felon, and not fit to be your cousin’s husband ; though, I suppose, like all the rest of them, you will not believe me.”

“ You are hardly in a state,” she answered, “ to expect that any one would believe you.”

“ Don’t believe me, then. Don’t take *my* word at all. I have got a witness who can

swear to everything I said. Will you trust him ?”

“That depends upon who he is,” she replied, “and where he can be found.”

“How should I know where he is? He may be in England, for what I can tell, or he may be in China or Japan. All I know is that he was my shipmate, and I had it from him first-hand.”

“China or Japan is rather far off for such a business as this, Mr. Russell. Is there nobody nearer home, not one among your choice companions in drinking and gambling, and worse things, if report speaks truly, who can back up your word, and make it pass current in Lipscombe? Surely, they will not all fail you at a pinch!”

“Your tongue is as sharp as ever, I see, Miss Jennie, whoever else fails me. Who said that I drank and gambled?”

“I said so,” she answered, “and I say it again. If no one else will be your friend, I

will be true enough to speak out ; that you may know why your old friends are ashamed of you, and why you are ashamed of yourself, at this very moment, in spite of all your big words and angry looks. Is all the past to go for nothing, Mr. Russell—all the old days when we were boy and girl together, and made garlands for Hussy's hat, or hunted for cowslips in the old Dingle woods ; and the Captain knew we were safe, because Tom Russell had the care of us ? Is it any wonder I am ashamed when I think of what you then were—a brave, true, sailor, a gentleman—and what you are now—a poor, disreputable idler, afraid to look a woman in the face, unless it be to insult her ? If there be no one woman left on earth to whom your own shame may be a grief, think, I implore you, of her—your own mother—whose last breath on earth was spent in praying for her child, and whose love for you is still unspent even in

heaven. Have you forgotten all this—have you forgotten *her* ? ”

To these terrible words, spoken rapidly, in a steady, clear voice, as if out of her heart, there was no reply ; and the silence that fell upon the two, there, in the broad sunlight, on the lonely hill-side, was broken only by the rolling boom of the great waves on the level sand far below them.

Gradually, as she spoke, the man's face had again turned pale ; his eyes, no longer daring to meet her honest gaze, turned away and slowly filled with tears. And, at last, he leaned his head bitterly on his hands against the gate, and sobbed like a child.

Then her heart melted at once. She laid her hand lightly on his shoulder, and, with all a woman's tenderness, said,—

“ Thank God, you can still shed tears. I knew that you had not forgotten her, nor her dying prayer. Even at this moment she may be with you, and be blessing God

for reaching your heart before it is too late."

But still there was no answer; as if the tears which blinded his eyes had choked his very utterance.

At last, however, he turned and spoke.

"Jennie Moreton," he said, "you have spoken to me as no woman—but one—ever cared, or ever dared, to speak to me; and I have no fit answer to make to you. But I am not made of stone, however bad, or however shameful, you may count me; and as I'm a living man, before God, I swear that no human being shall ever see me again as you have done to-day. Into my lips this cursed drink shall never enter again. Your bitter words have done this much for me—and God bless you for saying them. Will you shake hands with me once more before you go?"

"Gladly," she answered, "gladly, because I believe you are in earnest, and that there

are brighter days for you yet to come—though ‘the man on the hill,’ as you call him, may, after all, not be a felon’s son.”

“It *is* true, Jennie Moreton, I swear, every word of it is true.”

With these parting words he shook hands with her, and turned slowly down the zig-zag path that led to the sands; while she crossed the stile, and made her way over the fields back towards The Rosery. It was her turn to be pale now, and her eyes filled with tears. But they were not tears of shame or sorrow; and long before she reached home, she had more than recovered her usual spirits, and was quite ready to give Hester a good account of the sick woman. But of her interview on the cliff she said not a single word.

It is as well to add here that, so far as the cursed drink was concerned, the conscience-stricken man kept his vow. In other respects he seemed to be little, if at all, changed.

CHAPTER X.

ST. CATHARINE'S.

THUS it came to pass, strangely enough, that each of the two ladies at The Rosery had a secret from the other ; and that secret relating to the same person. But situated as they were, constantly together, and news from Lipscombe continually drifting in some shape or other to the house, such secrecy could not last long, and the old couplet which says,—

The falling out of faithful friends
Renewing is of love,

soon proved true in their case. It was only a question of time, and, shortly after the events of the last chapter, a single morning

cleared up all reserve as far as the main events of the past were concerned, and the old confidence between the two was restored ; as the close of their talk will serve to show.

“ Well, then, Jennie, we must agree to differ, I suppose ; but I am glad to have had a good chat with you ; for I hate secrets, and my own as much as other people’s. But it was very sly of you not to say a single word about your meeting on the cliff, all this time.”

“ We shall always differ, Hessy, while you persist in looking on Tom Russell as a mere outcast. Of course, I cannot expect you to believe a word against your paragon, Mr. Fairleigh.”

“ Not a paragon, I hope and pray ; and certainly not mine. A paragon must be a most disagreeable person, if there is any such creature going ; but I should be sorry to believe a scrap of slander like this about the merest acquaintance, on the word of such a

witness as yours ; much less about a friend. If he is speaking the truth, why doesn't he bring forward his proof ?”

“ His witness is in China.”

“ That is very unfortunate, indeed. And, so, on the idle word of some stray man years ago, and some thousands of miles away, of whom we know nothing,—not even his name,—a gentleman of spotless character is to be counted an impostor ; and we are to open our houses and hearts to a person whose chief employment seems to be gambling and drinking, when not engaged in inventing falsehoods for the *Lipscombe Gazette* !”

“ Ah, *there* lies the sting of the whole matter, Hessy ; the unpardonable sin. He dared to couple your paragon's name and Miss Langley's together in a newspaper paragraph, that, after all, only hinted at a bit of gossip which was already in everybody's mouth, and which, some people, my dear still say is not far from being true.”

“Do they? Then they say it is true when the only two persons concerned deny that it is so. And, Miss Jennie Moreton seems inclined to agree with them.”

“Outsiders often see most of the game, especially when it gets near the end.”

“Or, when it has not begun; because, in that case, they can invent the opening moves, the attack, the defence, defeat, and victory.”

“Opening moves, Miss Hester Langley? How dare you to attempt to throw dust in the eyes of an elderly person like me by such idle pretences? What would your paragon say if it ever reached his ears?”

“Once more, Jennie, you elderly but crafty young woman, *not* a paragon, I tell you—and not mine. He would say just what he said before; that the whole paragraph was a falsehood.”

“And was he very stern in insisting on that point? If so, it's the oddest way of making love that I ever heard of; while, as

to your pretending to agree with him, I look upon that as the most shameful piece of hypocrisy. But, then, you see, my experience in such matters is so small, that I can scarcely venture to have any opinion on the subject ; while as to the subtleties of the legal mind, they are utterly beyond my reach. At all events, he is safe against all risk of a ' breach of promise.' Hessy, I would give a sovereign, poor as I am, to have overheard the whole dialogue ; seen how you looked, and just caught your exact answer."

"You *have* heard the whole dialogue, Miss ; and, as to my appearance, of course I looked charming, as I always do ; though it did take me rather by surprise, I must say. What could I do but agree with him ? When a gentleman takes elaborate trouble to prove to a lady that a rumoured engagement between them is without foundation, what other answer can he expect ?"

"True, my dear, but there are scores of

ways of expressing assent, and in spite of all negatives you must have sent him away radiant with hope ; for radiant enough he seemed, after all his long talk with the Captain, marching down the lane with a look on his face that a rejected lover never would have dared to put on."

"I never said that I had rejected him, Jennie. One cannot reject what is never offered !"

"So, at last I have got the truth out of you, have I ? You accepted him, then ; that is clear enough ; and though it was all done like a proposition in Euclid, as becomes a counsel learned in the law, depend on it, you are legally snared, and before long he will come to claim his captive. Well done, Hessy ; well done. I shall forthwith begin to settle the bridesmaids' dresses ; and look out music for the happy day. What a pity that the bridegroom cannot be his own organist !"

"You are quite incorrigible," replied

Hester, smiling in spite of herself ; " how do you know that Mr. Fairleigh is musical ? "

" Has he never told you, my dear ? What a shame ! I happen to know that he is a first-rate musician ; a paragon's virtues you see cannot all be hid, however large the napkin, or modest the possessor."

At this moment the dinner-bell rang, and with a happy laugh, the two hurried off to dress for dinner.

It was not long after this, that one afternoon Hester chanced on her way home from the town, to pass by St. Catharine's, that old half-ruined chapelry already spoken of, that stood on the edge of the Manor-house estate, where former owners of the land had kept up a regular service under the conduct of their own chaplains. But, though now disused for public service, much of the building was still in good repair, and contained among other relics of the past, a small but choice organ. The door chanced to be open as she

that moment a soft strain of music, as if far away in the distance, stole upon her ear with so tender and dainty a melody as to chain the listener to the spot. It shot across the fading gloom of the chapel at first like a single ray of light ; then gradually expanding into full volume, it filled the whole building with glorious and solemn harmony, that rose and fell, and fell and rose again, like the tide of a mighty river. Then, out of the full splendour of the deep, rolling, chorus, there sprang forth a round, mellow strain that, beginning with soft, pleading entreaty, grew up note by note in power and beauty like a voice that would and must be heard. It soared away beyond the cloud of golden harmony, till every phrase and every cadence became instinct with life ; imploring, complaining, and rejoicing by turns ; and then, slowly descending into the infinite depths of the bass, once more it told the same story with new tenderness, passion,

and beauty ; while mingling with it, and answering to its earnest cry, from the far-off heights of the treble, came down a voice of liquid silver that crowned and completed the whole, as light gives life and beauty to a scene of quiet peace. Here and there, amid the crashes and discords of flowing harmony, stole in snatches of all but silence, when the strain dwindled to a mere thread, as if about to fade utterly away. But, little by little, she hardly knew how, it softly grew in strength until once more the lonely chapel re-echoed with sound, and a song of praise and joy and victory filled the listener's ears, and made her heart beat in unison with the cry of triumph. Then, at last, as if the message were all spent, it ceased.

As long as it lasted, Hester had stood spell-bound. She had never heard anything like it. It had spoken to her as no music ever had done ; not so much by its mere beauty, for she had heard good music else-

where, and felt its power, but by a grace and inner, living, meaning which she never dreamed could lie hidden in mere notes. And so with a strange joy in her heart, and tears of pleasure in her eyes,—wondering who the musician could be, and anxious to escape his notice,—she once more turned to go.

A few steps brought her to the door by which she had entered, but it had slammed fiercely to with the wind, and her utmost efforts were of no avail to open it. Again and again she tried, but to no purpose. Then, through the gloom, she heard the organ being shut, and a man's voice say, "Tomorrow at four, Tom ;" a door was opened in the chancel, closed, and locked, and presently steps came nearer and nearer down the aisle.

For a moment she almost resolved to let the musician pass by her, and run the risk of being locked into the chapel. But before

she could make up her mind at all, the stranger was close to her, and almost brushed her dress as he went by. He stopped, as if in doubt, opened the door, which had closed with a spring-lock, and, seeing a shadowy figure in the background, exclaimed, "Hollo! who is it?"

There was nothing therefore to be done but to come forward into the fading light and be recognised.

"Oh! Mr. Fairleigh, I really am very sorry to give all this trouble; but it was an entire accident. I never meant to play the part of a listener, but I strayed into the chapel while passing, not knowing any one was here, the door slammed, and I was made a prisoner, as you see. That is all I can say for myself."

"Miss Langley!" he answered, in simple amazement,— "This is good fortune, indeed; and I can only thank that monkey Tom Withers for leaving this door open, and

giving me this unexpected pleasure ; though I can only regret your being shut up here so long against your will. It is quite dark and late, too dark for you to walk home alone ; so you must put up with me for an escort."

It was in vain that she protested against this arrangement ; in vain she declared that she was quite used to walking about in the dark, and that she knew the road well.

"No, no," he replied, "my chances of seeing you are so few that I cannot listen to such excuses as these. And, unless my company is positively disagreeable, I must see you safely back to the Rosery."

This, of course, she could not admit, and so the two set out together. At first they walked on in silence, but this to Hester was more perplexing than talk, and she was the first to break it.

"You will hardly believe, Mr. Fairleigh,

that after all our years at the Rosery, and though I have passed St. Catharine's hundreds of times, to-day's was my first visit."

"All the greater my good fortune, Miss Hester; though I must again regret your having been shut up so long in the cold and darkness, and compelled to listen to indifferent music. The organ is not in good order, and I am sadly out of practice; as no doubt you discovered."

"I certainly did not discover either of these facts," she answered, quickly; "though, if you are fishing for compliments, I am afraid that you will fish in vain. I know nothing of organs, and I never praise people to their face."

"That I remember of old," he replied, "but neither instrument nor player in this case deserves praise, as you justly remark. I ought to have known better than attempt fishing of any kind; though the notion of

my having any other listener than Tom never entered my head, much less having a critical one."

"Pray don't quiz my musical knowledge, nor depreciate your own, Mr. Fairleigh. Excessive humility, as you once told me, is, you know, only another form of vanity. You are quite aware that the organ is a very good one, and that the player of this afternoon was a master of it."

At this sally the organist laughed heartily, as he answered, "Slain with an arrow from my own quiver; I deserve my fate, and have not a word more to say in defence."

But the ice was now fairly broken, and the conversation went on as brightly and freshly as in the old days when he was a chance visitor at the Rosery, and talked over the news from Lipscombe, or the last new packet of books.

At last he said, rather abruptly, as their walk drew to a close, "Have you quite for-

gotten our last walk, Miss Hester, by moonlight? You remembered that terrible sermon of mine against humility so well, that I hope you have a memory for plain facts?"

Then Hester's heart beat fast, for she knew what was coming; but she answered, bravely enough,—

"Quite well, Mr. Langley; I am not likely to forget the night when I came to the Manor-house as a beggar, nor do I wish to do so."

"Nay," he answered, "it is I who was the beggar; and my petition was a bold one indeed. You merely asked for such help as any one friend might give to another; *I* asked for that which no other woman in the world could give me but yourself. Is my petition a vain one? For many a long and weary month I have delayed asking it again; I have waited and hoped, and hoped and waited. But now suddenly this happy chance has made me speak once more; once

more and for the last time. You said just now, Miss Hester, that 'books,' in the last two years, had come to have a new meaning for you, and that even music, to-day, had spoken as it never spoke before. If I have helped, in any way, to unlock this secret meaning of words and sweet sounds, I implore you to let me touch one other topic. All the melody that you heard to-day,—every sound of beauty, of power, and of passion, that seemed to plead with the listener, as you say, every chord of joy, of triumph, sprang but from one root, and was kindled by but one word, and that word was 'Love.' Love which filled all my heart and quickened every pulse of melody, gave life to my touch, and spirit to every note ; it was love which at last pleaded for the poor musician, when he little dreamed who was listening ; which forces him to speak now, when he knows well who is his only hearer, and that her answer will brighten or cloud

his whole life. Does he, Miss Hester, does he speak in vain ? ”

All through these hasty and impassioned words poor Hester had been vainly endeavouring to make up her mind in what exact form to answer them ; but all in vain. She was intent on listening far more than answering, and joy filled her heart as she listened. She was far too true and too womanly to attempt to hide what she felt with all heart ; and though it was impossible for her to say that she loved this man as a young girl loves her first and free choice, yet she knew that she did love him and honour him as one of noble, pure, mind, and true, manly, strength, of tenderness, and truth.

Yet for a moment she hesitated.

“ Tell me,” he said, “ I implore you, what my fate is to be, at once. Suspense is harder than death.”

“ Forgive me,” she answered, “ for seeming

to hesitate or delay to speak when a woman is bound to speak, and to speak clearly and promptly. All I fear is, that I cannot love you as a wife should, and as such love as yours deserves." But not a single word more was needed or allowed, for in another moment a strong arm was round her waist, and a kiss printed on her lips that left no doubt as to the giver's absolute and rapturous content.

"God bless you, Hester Langley!" he said. "God bless you for those words, darling! You have been sunshine to my life through many a dark day, and many a weary night. Henceforward my days will be all sunshine."

The Rosery gate was by this time close at hand, and then suddenly their delicious talk had to come to an end. There is, therefore, little need to describe further how the few remaining minutes were spent by the happy lovers.

But we must add that Fairleigh, thus far victorious, pleaded hard for leave to speak to the Captain at once, and, after some little resistance on Hester's part, gained his point.

"I am afraid, sir," she said, "that you will be an unmerciful tyrant. I told you that you must give me one day to bewail my captivity, and you insist on proclaiming it to papa to-night; and, more dreadful still, I find myself giving way exactly when I meant to be most——"

What answer the culprit would have made to this charge is not known, but it suddenly came to an end at the word "most," and was concluded in a manner that seemed satisfactory to both the accuser and accused.

The supper party that night at the Rosery was a very happy one.

"My dear," said Jennie Moreton, in a whisper, as the two girls separated at last,

“the proposition in Euclid has been worked out—the problem solved; and I think I shall like my new brother-in-law, if he be mine, very much.”

CHAPTER XI.

MORE PLOTTING.

FOR a time Mr. Tom Russell seemed impressed for good by his interview on the Cliff. He was seen less often with his old companions in the billiard-room, and in idle sauntering about the town, and spent more time with his gun in lonely rambles up the valley of the Lip. But by degrees he grew tired of this solitary amusement, and drifted slowly back to his former haunts and habits, though nothing would induce him to touch spirits of any kind.

Of course, he never called at the Rosery, and since that meeting with Miss Jennie Moreton, which he kept a profound secret,

had seen nothing of the inmates but on one occasion, when he chanced to meet Hester and her lover in the wood above the mill. They were deeply engaged in happy talk, and she was looking up with a bright smile into her companion's face as Russell, unseen himself, stood watching them from a side-path in the underwood. He watched them go by with angry eyes; and the sound of her well-known voice and happy laugh filled him with all his old hatred.

"I knew it was true," he muttered, bitterly, to himself, "in spite of all their denials. Both of them as false as I said, and that lying lawyer laughing in his sleeve all the time. But I'll be even with them yet."

Full of such thoughts, he wandered slowly homewards, ready to quarrel with the first person he met.

Once back in his own quarters, it was soon apparent that affairs had all gone wrong with

him, and that even his friend and fellow-lodger was to have the benefit of his ill-temper.

“What an old humbug you are, Roper, to tell me that the report in town about that fellow Fairleigh was all bosh. I saw them both in the wood an hour ago, arm-in-arm together, making love as tenderly as a couple of doves, she looking up into his face all smiles and innocence, and he—confound him!—as cool and collected as if you had never published that lying second edition. I told you it was true *then*.”

“Months ago, Tom—months ago. Don’t get out of temper, and don’t abuse me. Upon my life, one would think you had nothing to do but to quarrel with your friends—that is, the few that are left. It may be all true now, for what I know, whatever it was then; and you have done your best to pave the way for it. You would show your hand before it came to your turn to play, and so

they won the' trick. But now it *is* won, don't for heaven's sake, make a fool of yourself again. There's as good fish in the sea as ever came out of it."

"How am I making a fool of myself, Roper?" he retorted, angrily. "There may be other fish in the sea, but that's no reason why this fellow should win the trick, as you call it, when his betters come to grief. I told you it was true at the first, and if you had only stuck to it, he would not have got the whip-hand of us now."

"Yes, yes, it's easy enough to talk of sticking to it now. You did not find it so easy when the man was here in this very room, and asked you for your proof. I held fast to your story till it burnt my fingers: and I don't know that Mr. Russell himself did more or better."

"But he shall not escape the next time, preach as you will, Roper. No more newspaper paragraphs this time. He shall hear

it plainly to his face, and then let him deny it if he can."

"So you are bent on trying it again, eh? Well, my friend, you may have it all your own way this time—all to yourself. Sam Roper will neither make nor mar in it. Rush off to the Manor-house as soon as you like. Beard the lion in his den, or out of his den, just as you please. All I say is, don't consult me, or refer to me, though I had a little paragraph ready for to-morrow's paper, which might have been useful. Fight your own battle in your own way, and then you'll be content, I suppose."

"That's right, Roper; just like you. Out of temper the very moment a poor devil says a word. Why didn't you tell me you had a paragraph ready, instead of pitching into me in this furious way? By all means paragraph the fellow again. At all events, let me see it."

But this was precisely what the peppery little editor would not do.

"No, no," he answered ; " there shall be no more fear of second editions, and no more chance of saying that Sam Roper spoilt your game. The paragraph shall go into 'pie' this very night."

And in spite of all Russell could do or say, his friend stuck to his resolution. He tried persuasion, flattery, entreaty, bullying; but he expended his whole armoury in vain. His friend would neither print his intended paragraph, nor reveal a single word of it, but went away to the office in that state of quiet, resolute, determination which the young sailor, from old experience, knew to be proof against every weapon.

From that day forward Russell was left to his own devices, and whatever plan he may have formed for the future, he either kept to himself or confided to some other ally. Like most weak, self-indulgent, men, he did not know when he was beaten; and like many a man of stubborn will, he believed that to

give way would be sheer cowardice. And among his many faults, cowardice had no place.

Time, however, passed away ; the golden hours flew swiftly by at the Rosery ; the happy lovers began to talk of the wedding day ; and rumour, as usual, was busy among the gossips of Lipscombe. The *Lapwing* in due time was declared ready for sea, and at last sailed ; but she sailed with a new first mate ; and Mr. Tom Russell, more embittered than ever, and more resolute than ever to beard the lion in his den, only waited for an opportunity to commence operations.

“ He could get a ship,” so he said, “ whenever he pleased ; let the croakers say what they would.”

And the croakers and busybodies of Lipscombe, as usual, found full employment in inventing reports about the Manor-house and its master, and in prophesying evil things.

of Mr. Thomas Russell. According to them, the marriage, which they had always foreseen, was to take place next week or next month, or as soon as the Captain's debts were all paid; the first mate of the *Lapwing* had been dismissed from his ship, and could get no employment; he was fast going to the dogs; he was an ill-used man; Miss Langley had jilted him; he deserved all he got, and no respectable people would have anything to do with him. Reports of this kind flew about the neighbourhood in abundance; and, though Russell professed to laugh at them as utterly unworthy of notice, yet they irritated and annoyed him beyond measure, and kept alive his old grudge against the Rosery and all connected with it.

His relations, too, with his fellow-lodger and companion, Roper, grew less and less cordial, though they had not yet come to an open rupture.

Under these circumstances, it was only natural that he should look about among his idle companions for some friend to whom he could unfold his story of wrongs and grievances, and from whom he might get some help towards obtaining redress.

This friend was soon found in one Dick Rogers, a red-haired, good-natured, fellow, who was just then living as a pupil in the house of Dr. Andrews, the chief medical practitioner of the neighbourhood.

Dick Rogers possessed one strong recommendation to Russell's favour: he was always cheerful, and always good-tempered. If he had little wisdom, he had at least common sense, and a rough, outspoken frankness of speech and manner, which, though it now and then ruffled his friend's feathers, often bore good, honest, fruit. He was a strong, burly fellow, standing six feet high, well able to take care of himself or a

friend in all emergencies. He played billiards badly enough for Russell to beat him five games out of six, and took defeat so calmly that outsiders might well doubt who was the victor. In addition to this, he was supremely ugly (except that no good-humoured, honest face can be anything but handsome), his face being covered with freckles, almost vying in brilliancy with his fiery locks, at which, when at school, his companions used to pretend to warm their hands. And this very ugliness was, in reality, though unknown to Russell, no small recommendation to a man who prided himself on his personal attractions.

"As plain as a knocker, or as Dick Rogers," had long been a favourite mode of expression among the young bloods in the billiard-room; and this was the man now chosen to be Russell's confidant.

He listened patiently to the whole of Tom's story; he always did listen patiently

to all his friend's stories, and generally had something to say of a cheering nature when the sad recital was finished. If he had no very wise suggestion to make, he at least had some small joke ready to crack at the enemy's expense; some cheerful view to expound of the brighter side of affairs, or a hearty laugh when his friends were inclined to be dismal.

When the narrative was concluded, he came out pretty much in his usual fashion.

"Well, Tom," he said, "I must say that you have been badly used on the whole, and deserve a deal of pity——"

"My dear fellow, hang your pity; I don't want a grain of it, but I do want help, and revenge."

"Nonsense, Tom; we are not play-acting; and that awful word revenge that you made so many mouths at is only fit for the last act of a tragedy. It seems to me, my dear boy, that you have been for some

time past making rather a pretty mess of it, and now find yourself reaping exactly what you sowed. If you ask me, you know, I should say let the whole business alone. Either the girl cares for you, or she doesn't. If she does care, she won't have this fellow Fairleigh. If she does *not*, then all your trouble is mere waste of powder. But at the same time, Tom, if you have made up your mind to worry the old boy, I am ready to stand by you through thick and thin.

"Worry is not good enough for him, Dick. He is an impostor, and ought to be shown up."

"But does *she* care for you?"

"Well," he slowly answered, "she did once; and if this fellow had not come in the way, she would now."

"Did once, Tom, is but a lame duck on slippery ice; as bad as saying 'it's all over now.' But do you care for her?"

"Yes and no, no and yes; it's a toss up whether I do or not. She has been so infernally proud and false over the whole business that I don't know——"

"But I *do* know, Tom. You need not toss up, because in this case it's 'heads I win, tails you lose.' When a fellow tosses up to find out whether he is in love or not, I can decide for him. He may safely look for a sweetheart in the next parish as soon as he likes. You are savage, no doubt, at some one else's being in favour where you failed; and you want to have a dig at this man on the hill—eh?"

"Exactly; and I mean him to have one, too."

"Well, well, Tom,—you have meant to have a dig at him, it seems, for some time past; but some how or other, as old Roper told you, you have played your cards too fast—or too much in a passion, to win the game. What will you say to me if I put

you up to a single move that shall make him dance on his head for a week ?”

“ Say ? replied Russell,—Say ? that you are a trump—the only trump I have seen in my hand for many a long month. What is the single move ?”

“ Answer me one thing first, Tom : on your honour, as a first mate, do you really believe this man Fairleigh is a felon’s son ?”

“ Upon my soul, I do. I had it first-hand from a messmate that I could trust ; and though he is away in China, for all I know, there is no reason why he should tell me a lie.”

“ Good, Tom, good. Now swear to me that you will not breathe to one living soul what the first move is to be, and I will whisper it into your ear. You will keep your word ?”

“ Without fail, Dick, I solemnly promise.”

“ Good, once more. Bide your time, then, and ——. I will be there to see the fun.”

Whatever the three mystic words were, they brought a smile of great content into a face that for many a day had known no such happiness ; and Tom Russell went back to his friend in High Street in a state of such exuberant spirits as made that worthy little man look at him with amazement. He was in a good temper all through dinner ; talked cheerily without a single gibe against the *Gazette*, or once railing about the falseness of women, and the villainy of lawyers.

"It's too good to last," said Roper to himself ; "but, nevertheless, while it does last, the change is like a west wind after a black north-easter."

That evening Mr. Tom Russell was the delight of the billiard-room ; he won several games from Dick Rogers without crowing, and was beaten more than once without invoking confusion on balls, cues, and the winner, or saying hard things as to his own luck. For a few brief hours,

"Omnes omnia bona dicere ;"

"all began to speak well of him ;" and even he himself felt the change of weather, in which they rejoiced.

He was positively affectionate with Rogers, when they parted for the night, and could not conceal what he felt.

"I say, Dick, old fellow, that move of yours, if it can be managed, will be a slap in the face which they can never expect, and must checkmate the whole affair. I'm not much of a hand at thanks,—but upon my life you have been deuced good to me. Do take a cheroot before you go—they are real Manillas."

"Thanks !" says Dick, "I want no thanks. What's the good of a friend if you can't make use of him ? All I say, is, don't count your chickens before they are hatched, much less before the eggs are laid. We are only thinking of laying at present."

CHAPTER XII.

GOLDEN DAYS.

THE more Hester saw of her future husband, the more she found in him to love and admire. He wore, as many reserved men do, an outer crust of manner which more or less concealed his real character ; but she had now fairly broken through this, and discovered many things hitherto unsuspected, but well worthy of a woman's best love. He was not only generous, but gentle—gentle in the highest, fullest, sense of the word ; not merely strong and decided in his convictions, but so strong as to deal kindly with the different views of others ; not merely courteous towards women, but innately chivalrous in all his thoughts about them, with a

tenderness which made him a true knight, and won the hearts of children at once. His mind was stored not only with an abundance of fruit, but of fruit that was ripe. There was in it neither crudeness, nor harshness, nor love of display. He never talked for mere effect, or to lay bare his friend's ignorance ; and, above all, he was never ashamed to confess his own. Gifts like these may be neither very rare nor very heroic ; but they were such as to charm a young and lively, imaginative woman ; and to clothe the owner with a halo of romance. She had never before met with such a man, always her superior, yet never making boast of his superiority ; always ready to be her equal, yet never making his condescension felt.

"Don't be too proud of your hero, my dear," says Miss Jennie ; "these paragons without a flaw won't bear too strong a light ; and specks under the microscope have a dreadful trick of looking monstrous."

"How many more times shall I tell you, Jennie, that he is not a paragon, and never sets up to be one? The very idea of a perfect man is enough to frighten me. I see specks enough without the help of glasses."

"Then, all I can say, Miss, is, that you make a profound secret of them. Only let anybody else dare to say a single word about a weakness or a failing in him, and you are ready to make mincemeat of them?"

"Why, you surely cannot expect me to sit still and hear him abused, without a word of defence?"

"I might as well expect low water, Hussy, on a flood-tide. But when is he coming here again? You have not seen him since yesterday; how will either of you ever exist so long apart?"

"As well as we can, Jennie," replies Hester, laughing, "as well as we did,—nay far better than we did before, when all those vile newspaper reports were flying about."

“And yet, those very vile newspaper reports, after all, only told the truth, although Mr. Somebody contradicted them with such a high hand. ‘Without foundation,’ *he* said, Hester, but how what is without foundation can turn out to be actually true, fairly puzzles me.”

“Easily puzzled, then, Jennie. Surely, what is not true to-day, may be true to-morrow. I was *not* then engaged to be Mr. Fairleigh’s wife; whereas the paragraph said I was. Are people to be married and settled and done for in print, just when their friends please, whether ready or not, accepted or unaccepted? Of course, Mr. Fairleigh said it was not true. When it is only half-past three, people have no right to affirm that it is six P.M.”

“Hester, you have no right whatever to crush me in that violent way with one of Mr. Paragon’s epigrams. ‘Half-past three and six’ are just his exact phrases. I know

his style of old, and I shall not submit to it, charming though he is. No doubt, however, that you feel better than you did. Anything, I should most humbly imagine—most humbly—must be better than uncertainty in love.”

“Quite right to be humble, Jennie, provided the humility is not excessive; but, of course, now you are talking of matters which you cannot possibly understand, and, therefore, I make allowances for you. Some day, my dear, you will know better. Meanwhile, I shall not expire, nor will he, if we do not meet for a week——”

But at this very moment there came a click at the garden-gate, which announced the arrival of a stranger, and at the very first sound Miss Hester came to a full stop in her speech, and rushed incontinently out of the room upstairs to her own chamber.

By what instinct she divined that the new-comer was the very person of whom they were speaking, no one but a young

lady in love may venture to say; but Mr. Fairleigh it was, and in a few minutes she came down, with a charming blush on her cheek, to welcome him.

"A blush becomes you, Hester," he said, gallantly, "as master Ovid tells us roses became a virgin's cheeks some scores of centuries ago, if you will allow me to quote him,—

"Pura genas ornant lilia mixta rosia."

And then he turned to inquire after his friend the Captain and Miss Jennie, who, with a bright smile on her face, emerged from a corner of the little dining-room.

"Miss Jennie," she said, demurely, "was as well as an ordinary mortal could expect to be, and the Captain was well, and on duty." And then she slyly whispered into Hester's ear, "My dear, as you are both growing poetical, and burning to be off on one of your wood rambles, it is time for me to be

gone ;" and away she went. But not before Hester had called out to her,—

"Do come with us, Jennie. Mr. Fairleigh, do make her come. She has been lecturing me all the morning, and now runs away at the bare chance of my having found an ally."

"Go with you !" replied the accused ; "and have you both heartily wishing me a mile off the whole time ! How dare you be such a hypocrite, Hessy ? Mr. Fairleigh, she really deserves a good scolding."

"You may depend on her being well scolded, Miss Jennie ; I will be unusually severe. Hypocrisy is one of my pet texts, and the occasion shall be thoroughly improved."

"So profitable to the disciple," interrupts Hester, "and so easy to the preacher : I feel a pang of repentance and improvement already."

And then, amidst a hearty laugh, away

went the happy couple into the woods, Jennie watching them from the trellised porch, as they went, with a bright smile on her face, that sprang from a warm, loving heart.

The talk of happy lovers, however charming to themselves, is apt to be wearisome to others ; and shall not be now inflicted on the reader, beyond one single episode. It is enough to say that they carried summer with them into the wintry woods ; the bare, desolate branches on either side of them were clothed with sunny leaves, and if the song of birds was wanting to make the picture complete, the bright, frosty air and clear sky here and there flecked with patches of grey cloud, and the quiet murmur of the rushing stream, were pleasures which even winter permitted, and they knew well how to enjoy.

“And so you deserve a scolding?” he said, at last. “Tell me the exact nature of your crime, that I may administer it in due form.”

"I am happy enough," was the quick answer—"happy enough even to bear a scolding; though it is not quite so easy to say why I deserve it. But I think that she warned me against my having a paragon to worship and growing proud of my possession; and I—well, I said that I hated paragons, and rather liked my diamond not to be without a flaw."

"Not bad advice, Hester; and not a bad line of defence. But how, if your paragon should, after all, turn out to have flaws that you never dreamed of? as he certainly will, if mortal; how then?"

"Then, why then, Mr. Fairleigh—well, Henry, if you insist on it—if the flaws are natural and belong to him, I shall rejoice to think that he is all the nearer to me by reason of his imperfections, or look at them with eyes that refuse to see anything but good, and wonder at other people's blindness."

"But at last, darling, your eyes may be

opened, too, and you may see clearly what love once hid ?”

“Then love shall be my oculist once more, and I will only see what he allows. One would think, to hear you both talk in this fashion, that I was about to marry a man to be ashamed of, instead of being proud of him, as I am !”

Then once more that dainty blush flushed Hester’s cheek, and her eyes sparkled, as she looked up into her lover’s happy face.

“God grant,” he answered, with passionate fervour, “that all your happy dream may come true. It is fair enough, and bright enough to make my life all sunshine—and me your debtor for life. How shall the poor paragon ever repay you ?”

“By loving me always, sir : through cloud and sunshine, through dark days and times, when without love, night will ‘be night, indeed.’”

This glimpse of the walk through the woods must suffice.

It was a day which neither of them ever forgot : even after long years, when the dream had partly come true, and the battle of life had to be fought in real earnest.

Many such rambles followed that one, during the happy months that succeeded, and much pleasant talk that needs no chronicler. The gossips in Lipscombe were soon busy enough in fixing the date of the marriage-day, the number of the bridesmaids, and the exact nature of the settlements ; nor was it too soon, seeing that all these points had been duly discussed at the Rosery, and the Captain was once more exuberant and full of praise at his future son-in-law's generosity.

CHAPTER XIII.

AT THE MANOR HOUSE.

WE must here, for a moment, look back to a short scene between Fairleigh and his sister, who had one day just returned from an hour's shopping in Lipscombe, and there learned certain tidings which seemed to have left her in no enviable frame of mind.

"You talk of all this," she had said to an old acquaintance on her way home, "as if it were a matter of certainty. All I can say is, that Mr. Fairleigh has not even mentioned the subject to me, and I am not prepared to believe it can possibly be true. Good morning."

But even while she uttered these words, she felt a horrible misgiving that the report was, after all, a true one, and that her reign

as mistress of the Manor-house was about to end. The designing young person had, after all, played her cards well, and the pretended denial of the newspaper report was a mere ruse. The only question now was whether she should at once see her brother, and expend on him the full vials of her wrath, or treat the whole matter with silent contempt. She decided that the latter course, if practicable, would be the most dignified, and most becoming to a lady in her position ; and in this frame of mind entered the library where she knew that her brother was busy with his morning letters. With his usual politeness, he rose to give her a chair near the fire, and expressed his pleasure at such an unexpected visit.

“ Pray do not let me disturb you, Henry ; I have my knitting, you see, and only want a quiet corner, which it was impossible to find in the drawing-room, where the servants are clearing out and dusting to-day.”

"My letters are all finished," he answered, "and I really am quite at leisure, and ready for the latest news from Lipscombe, if you have any."

"Nothing of the slightest interest whatever. Tapson, the butcher, had fallen down dead rather suddenly, in the market-place, yesterday, and bread has gone up a penny, owing to the late floods. That, I think, is all I heard in the shape of news, worth remembering, at all events. The tittle-tattle of tradespeople, of course, one cannot take notice of."

"That depends," replied her brother, leaning back in his easy chair, "very much upon the nature of the tittle-tattle. I have known a very small and select morsel of gossip come out of Gingham, the draper's shop, that was worth its weight in gold at the next Dorcas meeting."

"Jesting, as usual, Henry ; when you are well aware all the time that at the Dorcas

meetings one lady reads aloud while all the others work ; and no conversation whatever is allowed."

"My dear, except on your word, I never could have believed in such a state of unparalleled suffering. Such an inhuman enactment as profound silence among a dozen ladies ought not to be tolerated for a single day. What does Mrs. Gingham say to such a law ?"

"I never asked her opinion on the subject. Mrs. Gingham is a highly respectable woman, and always expresses herself in a most becoming manner on all subjects."

"True to the very life, Sarah ; ready as Roper himself, to talk on every possible subject, and all people under the sun, at a moment's notice. I should not mind staking a pair of gloves, now, that she had some one little choice bit of information for your especial benefit to-day ?"

"Nothing of the sort, I can assure you.

(Oh ! Miss Fairleigh !) You would certainly lose your gloves, as you seem to be losing your temper."

"Me ! my dear sister ? I never was in a calmer or happier frame of mind than at this very moment. All I can say, is, that if Mrs. Gingham did not furnish you with a dish of gossip to-day, she must be losing the use of her tongue from incessant use. Cudlip, my barber, tells me this morning that the whole town is full of it. Everybody is talking of it."

"Talking of what, Henry ?" replied the lady, at last looking up from her knitting, but in her gravest manner, "I do not enjoy, you see, the advantage of Cudlip's society."

"A great loss, Sarah, I can assure you. He was unusually fertile this morning, and I really thought that Mrs. Gingham must have been beforehand with me in retailing his to-day's budget. 'All over the town,' were his very words, and the villain cut me, as you

may see, in two places, as he uttered them. I am astonished that you heard nothing of the news, in your whole round of visits ! ”

“ But I have paid no round of visits : Tapsen’s and Gingham’s were the only two shops I entered, and Miss Pratt the only other person I spoke to on my way home. You ask me for news, when it seems that all the time you are in full possession of what you ask for ? It is lucky for me that I have not the faintest curiosity in the matter.”

“ You deserve infinite praise, Sarah, for practising such rigid self-denial, at all events, and deserve to be kept no longer in suspense. I was the fortunate subject of Cudlip’s gossip this morning, and he announced to me my own marriage. The day is, I believe, fixed ; all the preliminaries are arranged, the bridesmaids chosen, and the only doubtful point is the bride’s dress. We are to be married by banns, it seems, and spend the honeymoon at Torquay ! ”

“Are you joking, Henry, once more, or in sober earnest?”

“In earnest, most solemn and sober; and the only preparatory step appears to be for me to bring Miss Langley over to the Manor-house, that she may really look over her future home, under my sister’s kind guidance.”

“In other words, I am to have a polite notice to quit? It really seems hardly worth while to have suddenly taken so much trouble on my account. I could no doubt arrange to have my few goods and chattels moved out of your way—as the marriage seems to be so close at hand—though, when poor Miss Pratt alluded to such a report this morning, I positively declined to believe a single word of it! And now, after all, it seems that she was right; and strangers are fully acquainted with my own brother’s family affairs, which I am left to learn just by mere accident! Still, I am very grateful

for being honoured with any small confidence, even at the last minute,—very. If your future wife only proves equally courteous and communicative, we shall get on charmingly during the short time of my remaining here.”

“Short fiddle-sticks, Sarah,” interrupted the barrister; “we have lived together well enough for the last twenty years, and there is no reason why we should not live in the same house for the next twenty. At all events, it will not be Miss Langley’s fault if we do not. She is most anxious that you should remain here; and if you would only exercise a little common sense——”

“In which I am utterly deficient.”

“Rather deficient, my dear, rather deficient at times when you get excited—you would see your way to settle matters with her in five minutes. She is a person with whom it is impossible to quarrel.”

“Quite impossible in my case,” replies the

lady—her temper now rapidly rising—“because I shall be entirely out of her way. I have common sense sufficient for that, at all events; and, as you are often good enough to remind me, it takes two to make a quarrel. My opinion of the young lady in question I told you long ago, and need not now repeat. Her designs seem, I regret to say, to have succeeded at last; but I trust I know my duty as a Christian well enough not to utter a single murmur, make a single difficulty, or express a wish but for your future happiness. Further than this, I can only pray for you, that such an extraordinary step, at your time of life, may be overruled for good.”

“Upset you mean, my dear Sarah, upset,” replied Fairleigh, still keeping his temper: “it is better perhaps to speak out plainly in such matters.”

“No, not upset, Henry, unless Providence so wills it, in which case——”

“I will finish the sentence for you, my

dear : in which case you would be devoutly thankful. But at my time of life," he added, with a hearty laugh, " at my time of life, as you wisely call it, Providence rarely interferes. If a man is bent on having his own way, he is generally permitted to have it, and carry out his infatuation to the bitter end. And this is what it will come to, I fear, in my case. Joking apart, however, my dear, Miss Langley has promised to be my wife ; and now that all the preliminaries are settled, it is only fair that she should come over and have a look at her new home. Under these circumstances, and as she is coming before very long, wouldn't it be easier and pleasanter for you to give her a word of welcome, and as you will live together, if God spares us, for the rest of your lives, to begin the term with a little sunshine ? You must surely see, Sarah, that I am speaking only for your own good and happiness, as well as hers."

But this was precisely what Miss Fairleigh did not see. She had already made up her mind to a decided line of action, and from this she was determined not to flinch. It was a painful, a most painful, course, but plainly her duty, and when the voice of duty called she was bound to obey; no matter how great the sacrifice or terrible the trial. If her brother had made up his mind to rush into this extraordinary—she must say extraordinary and ill-matched—connection, she could not possibly sanction with her presence what she did not approve of; and, though he declined her prayers, she could really take no part in the arrangements. The bailiff's cottage, at the other end of the estate, was still empty, and, with her brother's permission, might easily be converted into a suitable residence, quite in time to admit of her removal before the Manor-house was turned upside down for its new mistress.

And to this resolution, in spite of all that Fairleigh could say—in spite of all his endeavours to coax the lady into a good temper by treating it as a mere joke, and to convince her of its folly by serious argument—to this resolution she steadily adhered. She had a little jointure of about three hundred a year of her own, of which she was absolute mistress, and this, she said, would suffice for all her few wants ; and in the cottage she should at all events be out of everybody's way.

It may as well be here added that before the marriage-day she was safely ensconced in her new home, and there had abundant leisure to offer up those prayers for the bridegroom's welfare, to which he had so profanely alluded.

When, therefore, Hester paid her first visit to the Manor-house as its future mistress, Mr. Fairleigh was the only person there to offer her and Jennie Moreton a welcome.

“The fact is,” he said, as they went down to luncheon, “my sister is a very peculiar person, and, like a great goose, Hester, has chosen to run her head against the wall, when there was no need for any such folly. The house is big enough for us all, and she might have lived here for ever and ever, if maiden ladies endure so long; but she would listen to nothing I could say; and when she heard that you were coming to-day, set out in the pony-carriage to make calls at Yealmpton.

When luncheon was over, Fairleigh conducted his two guests through a suite of rooms which he was having fitted up for Hester’s especial use. They were three in number, the first being a large and handsome drawing-room, fitted up with light and elegant furniture, all of polished deal—chairs, tables, and even the piano being of the same material, as well as some six or eight tiny book-cases, which, with a few choice pic-

tures, gave clear evidence of the owner's refinement and good taste. This led by folding-doors into a much smaller room—for winter use—with a wide, open fireplace between the two windows that looked out into the garden ; and this, again, opened by a bookshelf-door into a dainty little boudoir, with a bay-window that commanded a charming view of the valley of the Lip, and St. Catherine's Chapel. The walls were papered with grey and silver, the furniture and a second piano being of maple, and the book-cases that filled every corner, of walnut.

“ Here,” he said, “ you will find all your old friends, and when you are tired of chatting with the rank and fashion of Lipscombe, here, I hope, you will admit me, when I am good, and deserve such a reward. I have ventured to have all this done in my own way, without waiting for your advice or suggestion, as my sister

utterly declined having a single voice in the matter, though I had no notion until to-day that she really meant to avoid you. Now tell me frankly what alterations I shall make."

But both ladies declared that not a single alteration was needed, while Hester was loud in her praises of all that had been done.

"It is hard," she said, to suggest the least alteration where all is so perfect, or to make a request where all my wishes have been anticipated. I can only thank you for such thoughtful, loving care."

"Only thank me," he answered, "by being happy, and looking happy, when you are mistress here, and I shall be repaid a thousandfold. But is there no suggestion you can make? I give you *carte blanche*."

"He finds it incredible, my dear Hussy," said Miss Moreton, "that two ladies should be found of one mind in matters of taste

and colour. I vote that we begin criticising at once severely."

"I only wish that you would commence *instantly*," replied Fairleigh. "The fact is I have been so long accustomed to the wholesome discipline of contradiction, and to have holes picked in my choicest works here, that warm approval alarms me, and makes me suspicious of failure."

But neither Hester nor her companion would accuse him of failure or mistake in any point, however trifling; and he was obliged to be content with praise. Praise from the lips of two pretty women, especially when a man is in love with one of them, is too pleasant a diet not to win its way at last; and so Mr. Fairleigh led them out into his gardens and green-houses in a genial sunshine, that even December could not cloud, and which told of coming spring.

Even here they found much to praise, and

the owner of the domain was compelled once more to be a listener, as he said, to the catalogue of his own merits as a gardener ; when, as he justly added, all the praise was due to Johnny Randall, a tall, weather-beaten Scotchman, who was just then busy with his spade on a neighbouring flower-bed.

“ He doesn’t look like a man over-burdened with taste or feeling, does he, Miss Moreton ” says Fairleigh. “ Yet, rough and course as looks, you might search the country for miles round, and not find his equal in blending the colours for a parterre ; and here you are giving all the credit to me who only pay his wages. Never trust to appearances. I dare say I seem a most obliging, civil, person in public, while, all the time, in private life I am a most terrible tyrant. Ask Randall, now, if I am not.”

“ No, no,” answered Jennie, with a grave

smile ; “ you shall be pestered with no more laudation. The poor man will not dare to open his lips as to his master’s iniquities. It will be time enough for Hester to find out what a monster you are, say in three months’ time, and be glad of all her friends’ condolences.”

In this fashion they chatted gaily on for a while, until the waning light warned them that it was time to set out for the Rosery.

Mr. Fairleigh begged hard to be their escort, but this request was sternly refused even by Hester herself.

“ We have already seized upon you,” she said, for almost an entire day, and driven your sister into the wilds of Yealmpton to escape from us. If you go with us to the Rosery, you will be late for dinner, and then get such a lecture on the improprieties as will fairly ruin your appetite, while all the blame is thrown on poor me. Remember,



the 1990s, the number of people in the world who are obese has increased by 100% (World Health Organization 2000). The prevalence of obesity in the United States has increased from 15% in 1980 to 25% in 1994 (Flegal et al. 1994). In the United Kingdom, the prevalence of obesity has increased from 10% in 1980 to 15% in 1994 (Reilly et al. 1995).

Obesity is a risk factor for a number of chronic diseases, including coronary heart disease, stroke, type 2 diabetes, and certain types of cancer (World Health Organization 2000). Obesity is also a risk factor for a number of mental health problems, including depression, anxiety, and eating disorders (Reilly et al. 1995). The prevalence of obesity in the United States has increased from 15% in 1980 to 25% in 1994 (Flegal et al. 1994). In the United Kingdom, the prevalence of obesity has increased from 10% in 1980 to 15% in 1994 (Reilly et al. 1995).

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